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The Borzoi Plays I

WAR

A play in four acts translated by Thomas Seltzer from the Russian of

Michael Artzibashef

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War

THE BORZOI PLAYS

I WAR
By Michael Artzibashef

II MOLOCH
By Beulah Marie Dix

III MORAL
By Ludwig Thoma

IV THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL
By Nicolay Gogol

The Borzoi Plays I

WAR

A play in four acts translated by Thomas Seltzer from the Russian of

Michael Artzibashef

New York · Alfred A Knopf · 1916

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NOTE

This play was published in *The Drama*, Chicago, February, 1916. I am grateful to Mr. Theodore B. Hinckley, its editor, for his kind permission to reprint it.

The proper transliteration of the author's name is Artzybashev, not Artzibashef. But as the latter spelling has been made familiar by the English translator of his novels, it is used here to prevent possible confusion.

T. S.

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MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF

Of the three living Russian authors who have achieved world fame, Gorky, Andreyev and Artzibashef, Gorky is better known than read in this country, Andreyev is both known and read, though by more limited numbers, while Artzibashef is read more and known less. To enjoy Gorky and Andreyev one must, it seems, be a devotee of literature, and a devotee of literature is always interested in the personalities of its creators. But one can enjoy Artzibashef's writings and concern oneself little about Artzibashef the man. Like the English servant girl who asked the librarian for a copy of *Pamela* to read it for the twentieth time and could not name Richardson, its author, unconscious apparently that it had an author, so many an American will devour a novel like *Sanine* without bothering to pronounce the name of its writer.

Richardson and Artzibashef — a strange collocation! It would seem on the face of it that they are farther removed from each other in the nature and quality of their works than they are even in time. And yet there is a fundamental kinship between the two. The book on which Richardson's fame rests has made its wide appeal by the predominance of that element in it which is also the predominant note in *Sanine* — love, sex. This element in *Sanine* it is that has given it hundreds of thousands of readers in Russia, Germany, and France and has spread its fame to England and America, where temporarily surrendering our second nature, puritanism, to our primal instincts, we too are beginning to read it by the thousands.

Nevertheless, in the treatment of their basic material,

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the natural instincts of man, Richardson and Artzibashef are, as may well be expected, poles apart. Strange as it may seem, the eighteenth century Englishman, for all his artistic crudity and insular narrowness, sees life from a broader, more comprehensively human viewpoint than the consummate Russian artist, the highest expression of extreme modernity. Let this much be said in despite of all the sneers and contemptuous shruggings of the shoulders of our individualist anarchs: Richardson takes a less one-sided view of life than Artzibashef. He finds men living not only by their instincts but by their conventions as well. And he does not inquire whether these conventions were superimposed by tradition, prejudice, or superannuated reason, which is now the very opposite of reason. His task as an artist is merely to take account of them. To ignore them is to ignore factors in human life which are as surely existent as the natural instincts. Because the question as to whether these conventions are merely secondary forces in human life didn't even present itself to him, he was able to give a more complete picture of life as it actually was in his time. He was not great enough artist to remain impartial. Virtue must be rewarded, and to that end the natural instincts, though not ignored, must be fought and brought to terms.

Yet the animal part of man fares far better in *Pamela* than virtue does in *Sanine*. Even granting the supremacy of the former, the English novelist gives his enemy, the animal impulses, a fairer chance, relatively to the actual part they play in human conduct, than Artzibashef does to his pet aversion, moral restraint. From first to last in *Sanine*, in the short story, *The Wife*, and in numerous other works, morality, and chiefly sex morality, is made to seem such a small, feeble, pitiful thing, that apart from all other considerations, just in the interest of unprejudiced truth, it must be said: "It

is not so. The facts do not warrant it. Sanine's presentation of the case is at least as much of an undervaluation of the strength of the ethical factors, as the Puritan's is an exaggeration of them." We turn to page 49 of the Russian edition and find Sanine saying:

"I have always wondered why people are so opposed to drink. In my opinion it is only a drunken man who lives the way a man should live."

"Or an animal," Novikov remarked.

"All right. What of it?" Sanine retorted. "The fact remains that a drunken man does nothing but what he wants to do. If he wants to drink, he drinks. And he is not ashamed of being jolly and making merry."

"Sometimes he fights, too," Raznichev observed.

"Yes, that's sometimes the case."

"You don't fight when you are drunk?" asked Novikov.

"No. I am more quarrelsome when I am sober. When I am drunk, I am the kindest of men because I forget such a lot of meanness."

"But everybody else is not like you in that respect."

"I am sorry. But what do I care for everybody else? Everybody else isn't anything in the world to me."

"That's not the right way to speak," remarked Novikov.

"Why not, if it's the truth?"

"A nice truth," said Lilya, tossing her head.

"The best I know of," said Ivanov for Sanine.

A very interesting discussion pro and con of the liquor question, and in perfect character, too. Artzibashef is too fine an artist to strike a false note. But when we are left to infer that Sanine has spoken the last word on this, as on all other subjects upon which he pronounces his demolishing dicta, then we must enter our demurrer.

Then what is Artibashef's strength? It is this:

within the limits of that part of the world in which his characters move, he is powerfully, fearfully, mercilessly, often irritatingly true to life. With a touch as sure as Tolstoy's and with his simplicity, too, he conjures before us a picture, a situation, a character, a mood to which we must in honesty bow assent. And it is all the more wonderful because of the simple mechanism with which he produces his effects. There is no straining, nothing in each unit of composition which a child could not do as well. Yet the net result is a product of rare harmony and beauty bringing that satisfaction which only a work of real art can inspire.

When *Sanine* was published, it immediately produced a sensation and aroused a discussion that in volume and intensity was unusual even in Russia, where literary discussions are frequent and serious. No book since the publication of Turgenev's *Fathers and Children,* as Artzibashef himself tells us, stirred up such interest. It was hailed with wild enthusiasm and attacked with savage ferocity. And the author himself frankly admits that "both the eulogies and the condemnations are equally one-sided." His own story of the fortunes and the significance of the book is interesting and illuminating.

"In the year 1903, I wrote *Sanine.* This fact is willfully suppressed by Russian critics; moreover, they try to persuade the public that *Sanine* is an outcome of the reaction of the year 1907, and that I have followed the fashionable tendency of contemporary Russian literature. In reality, however, the novel had been read by editors of two reviews and by many celebrated authors as early as 1903. Again I owe it to the censorship and the timidity of publishers that it was not brought out at the time. It is an interesting fact that the novel was refused on account of its ideas by the editorial staff of the same monthly review, *Sovremienny Mir,* which some

years later begged me to give it to them for publication. In this way *Sanine* made its appearance five years too late. This was very much against it: at the time of its appearance literature had been flooded by streams of pornographic and even homosexual works, and my novel was likely to be judged with these.

"*Sanine* is neither a novel of ethics nor a libel on the younger generation. *Sanine* is the apology for individualism; the hero of the novel is a type. In its pure form this type is still new and rare, but its spirit is in every frank, bold and strong representative of the new Russia. A number of imitators who have never grasped my ideas hastened to turn the success of *Sanine* to their own advantage; they injured me greatly by inundating the literary world with wantonly obscene writings, thus degrading in the reader's eyes what I wished to express in *Sanine*.

"The critics persisted in ranking me with the number of second-rate imitators of *Sanine* who displayed their 'marketable wares' full of all sorts of offensiveness. Not until recently, when *Sanine* had crossed the frontiers, and translations had appeared in Germany, France, Italy, Bohemia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Denmark, and also, in part, in Japan, were other voices to be heard among the critics. Russia always does grovel before foreign opinion."

The sensational success of *Sanine* has thrust Artzibashef's other works into the background and, as usually happens, has resulted in a one-sided estimate of the author. The fact, however, is that Artzibashef has by no means confined himself to the question of sex. True to the best literary traditions, he reflects the manifold changing interests of Russian contemporary society. His first story, *Pasha Tumanov,* written in 1901, dealt with the evils of the Russian grammar schools, a hotbed of suicides. Some of his best creations, which he began

in 1905, are to be found in the stories of the revolution. They are vivid pictures of Russian rádical types, and in the rendering of the atmosphere of the Revolution and in the revelation of the motive forces that impelled its actors, they are unexcelled even by Ropshin, who gained signal fame several years later by the publication of his two remarkable books on the same subject. Occasionally Artzibashef takes an excursion into the lower depths, as in the psychologic study of *The Shoe Maker,* which is quite in the vein of Gorky. But all this Artzibashef considers as just incidental, foreign to his real mission, which, he says, is to preach the gospel of " anarchic individualism."

Of the two plays he has written, *Jealousy,* published in 1913, bears a strong kinship to *Sanine,* with the erotic element accented to the abnormal. The outbreak of the war turned Russian literature away from the wild current of sex, into which it had been caught up at the end of the Revolution and in which it ran with ever increasing impetus for several years. It is to be hoped that the banishment of exaggerated emotion from the field of Russian literature will be permanent. It has had ample time to do its best and worst, and it has done it. What further function is left to it? Russian life as well as Russian literature can only gain if with the disappearance of the " Sanine Clubs " that sprang up like mushrooms after the publication of the book, has come also the culmination of the cheap literature in imitation of *Sanine* without the genius of its author.*

* Since the above was written a new novel by Artzibashef has appeared bearing the Biblical title *The Woman Standing in the Midst.* It is quite in the vein of *Sanine* and even more relentless in detail. There is this important difference, however — the heroine revolts against the men who have brought moral ruin upon her in the pursuit of their pleasure, and the men themselves appear in anything but a favorable light. So that the whole creates the impression of being a homily against Saninism.

The effect of new conditions upon Artzibashef himself has been marvelously purifying. It seems scarcely credible that the author of *Jealousy* could have written *War* only a little over a year later. With the bigness of his theme the author's art has grown big. In its classic simplicity and restraint *War* is worthy of Turgenev; in its cruel exposition of the logic of horrible facts it reaches the loftiness of the Greek tragedy. In the technique, to be sure, Artzibashef is as anarchic as in his philosophy; but it is the anarchy of the very events the play depicts, an anarchy that makes the play equivalent to life. Artzibashef is not bothered, as many a smaller playwright might have been bothered, by the fact that the first act is just a picture that might easily have been omitted, and thus have made the action more concentrated. What he gains by the contrast between the peaceful happy situation in the first act and the havoc in the next three amply repays for the looseness in construction. Observe, too, the subtle use of the two characters, the consumptive Semyonov and the Prince, both of them weaklings in the first act, the one to be pitied for his physical disability, the other for his moral inferiority. In the next three acts the tables are turned. In the world left after the war has done its work and marked its impress upon its victims, Semyonov and the Prince have become the strong ones.

Of course, the militarist may say of this play what I have said before of *Sanine*. It exaggerates one side. The other side is not given a hearing. But this is a question about which millions see only one side, and for an artist to be of those millions does not condemn him for narrowness.

The following extracts from a short autobiographical sketch contain the essential facts of Artzibashef's career. The passage I quoted on *Sanine* is also taken from this sketch.

"I was born in the year 1878 in a small town in Southern Russia. By name and extraction I am Tartar, but not of pure descent, since there is Russian, French, Georgian, and Polish blood in my veins. There is one of my ancestors of whom I am proud, and that is the well-known Polish rebel leader Kosciusko, my great-grandfather on the maternal side. My father was a small landowner, a retired officer; my mother died of consumption when I was three years old, bequeathing me a legacy of tuberculosis. I did not become seriously ill until 1907, but even before that the tuberculosis never left me in peace, as it manifested itself in various forms of illness.

"I went to a grammar-school in the provinces; but as I had taken the keenest interest in painting from my childhood, I left it at the age of sixteen and went to a school of art. I was very poor; I had to live in dirty garrets without enough to eat, and the worst of it all was that I had not enough money for my principal needs — paints and canvas. So it was not given to me to become an artist; to earn anything at all I was obliged to do caricatures and write short essays and humorous tales for all kinds of cheap papers.

"Quite by chance, in the year 1901, I wrote my first story, *Pasha Tumanov*. An actual occurrence and my own hatred for the superannuated schools suggested the subject. But the censorship at that time categorically forbade any statements to be made which did not show life in the schools in a pleasing light. Thus it was impossible for the story to achieve publicity at the right time, and it did not appear until some years later in book form. That has been the fate, moreover, of many of my things. In spite of this the story was not without favorable results for me; it attracted the attention of the editorial staff and stimulated me to further work. I renounced my dream of becoming an artist and trans-

ferred my allegiance to literature. This was very hard; even to-day I cannot see paintings without emotion. I love colors more than words.

"*Pasha Tumanov* was followed by two or three stories which interested the editor of a small review, a man named Miroliubov. My first introduction to literary circles I owe to him. Up till then I had never been in editorial offices, but had always sent my tales by post. This was because I imagined them as temples consecrated to literature, which I revered. Nowadays we live in other times and have other customs in Russia; advertisement and influence dominate the literary world. However, Miroliubov's name will leave its mark on the history of Russian literature, although he did not write himself.

"In the year 1905, during the bloody Revolution much that I had written for purposes of agitation was confiscated. I myself was indicted, but the temporary success of the Revolution at the end of 1905 saved me from punishment.

"My development was very strongly influenced by Tolstoy, although I never shared his views on non-resistance to evil. As an artist he overpowered me, and I found it difficult not to model my work on his. Dostoevsky, and to a certain extent, Chekhov, played almost as great a part, and Victor Hugo and Goethe were constantly before my eyes. These five names are those of my teachers and literary masters.

"It is often thought here that Nietzsche exercised a great influence over me. This surprises me, for the simple reason that I never read Nietzsche. This brilliant thinker is out of sympathy with me, both in his ideas and in the bombastic form of his works, and I have never got beyond the beginnings of his books. Max Stirner is to me much nearer and more comprehensible."

THOMAS SELTZER.

WAR

A Play in Four Acts, translated from the Russian of Michael Artzibashef by Thomas Seltzer

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Piotr Ivanovich, a retired colonel.
Olga Petrovna, his wife.
Volodya, a student, their son.
Nina, their daughter.
Vladimir Aleksandrovich, an officer, her husband.
Asya, a young girl.
Daue, a second lieutenant.
Prince Voronetzky, a landowner.
Semyonov, a student.
Sonya and Kolya, children of an officer killed in the war.
Sidorenko, an officer's servant.
Katya, a maid.
A medical student, a Sister of Mercy, and soldiers.

The action takes place in the house of Piotr in the Russia of to-day.

WAR

ACT I

It is a bright, sunny day in spring. The trees in front of an old nobleman's house are in blossom. Broad steps lead from a columned terrace down to the garden. On the terrace is a large rush-bottom armchair, and on one side under a large tree a garden bench. In front of the house a circular plot with early spring flowers. Beyond the trees is seen a railing and a wicket gate opening into a city street. Olga Petrovna, the mother, is at work in the flower bed, while Piotr Ivanovich, her husband stands looking on, smoking. He wears a light uniform and is hatless.

OLGA. You had better put your cap on, Piotr. You'll catch cold.

PIOTR. Oh, no; I'm warm.

OLGA. Yes, warm. You think so. It's just the kind of weather one is apt to catch a cold in. I'll tell Katya to bring you your cap.

PIOTR. Don't; I don't need it.

OLGA [*not heeding him, she calls*]. Katya, Katya.

KATYA [*coming out on the terrace*]. What is it?

OLGA. Bring the master's cap, and tell Aksinya to start a fire in the fireplace.

KATYA. Yes, ma'am. [*She goes out.*]

PIOTR [*looking at his watch*]. It's time for coffee. Will you be done soon?

Olga. What time is it?

Piotr. Half past twelve — time long ago.

Olga. I'll be through in a moment. I must tell Sidorenko to water the flowers every evening. He never does a stroke of work, anyway — just runs after Katya the whole day.

Katya [*coming down the steps*]. Here's your cap, Master.

Olga. Is Vladimir Aleksandrovich up yet?

Katya. Yes, he's washing. Shall I get the coffee ready?

Olga. Yes, yes. Take a clean tablecloth from the sideboard. And be careful not to soil it at once the way you always do. I can never keep a large enough supply of tablecloths.

Katya. All right, ma'am; I'll be careful. [*She goes into the house.*]

Piotr [*pulling his cap down on his head with an air of gravity*]. I don't remember a spring like this for ever so long. Last year at this time it was still quite cold.

Olga. You just imagine it, Piotr. Last year was warm too. It's the month of May, thank God!

Piotr. I remember distinctly wearing an overcoat when I went out on the tenth of May.

Olga. You don't remember any such thing. It's your imagination, nothing else, I assure you.

Piotr [*heatedly*]. But I remember it distinctly. [*After a pause.*] But I never saw a spring like the one in the year 1877, when we crossed the frontier.

Olga [*without heeding him*]. I haven't planted any resedas this year.

Piotr. When we arrived at the Danube —

Olga. Here is Nina. Why are you dressed so lightly, Ninochka? I'll tell Vladimir on you.

Nina [*in a light summer dress, comes out on the*

terrace and sits down on the top step]. All right, Mamma; tell him.— What were you talking about so animatedly, Papa?

PIOTR. I was saying that in 1877, when we crossed the frontier —

OLGA [*annoyed*]. We've heard all that before, Piotr.

PIOTR [*with heat*]. Why, I declare! Nina asked me a question, and I answered her. Why, why —

NINA [*smiling quietly*]. Papa, isn't it time for you to take your coffee?

PIOTR [*instantly forgetting the dispute*]. Yes, high time. But you can't tear your mother away from her flowers!

OLGA. One moment, one moment!

PIOTR. I know your "one moment." Nina, has Vladimir come back yet?

NINA. He'll be here presently.

PIOTR. Well, Olga.

OLGA. You go, go. I'll be coming soon.

PIOTR [*good-naturedly, rubbing his hands and walking into the house*]. Nina, make her come in soon, or she'll be at it the rest of the day. [*He goes into the house.*]

There is silence as Olga potters over the flowers, passing from one side of the plot to the other. Nina, sitting on the terrace, looks around with a bright, contemplative expression.

NINA. I woke up today thinking it will soon be three years that I'm married. How strange!

OLGA. Why strange?

NINA. I don't know. When I first met Vladimir I didn't like him a bit, and if somebody had told me I was going to marry him I'd have laughed at the idea.

OLGA. It's always like that.

NINA [*after a silence*]. I had just graduated from

college, and my head was all awhirl with the expectation of something unusual. Prince Voronetsky was courting me, and I almost fell in love with him. In fact, I *was* a little in love with him. Suddenly I stopped caring for the Prince and began to feel that Vladimir was the best, the dearest of men. How stupid I was then, so afraid people would find out that Vladimir and I had kissed. I thought something dreadful would happen if it were found out. But then it did come out, and there was nothing terrible about it, and everybody was glad. [*After a silence.*] It was a great time. [*Sadly.*] It seems to me nothing like it will ever come into my life again.

Olga [*in a philosophical tone*]. It was good, and it will be better still.

Nina. No; nothing like it again for me. It was something — like a fairy tale, like a dream. I sometimes think there will never again be such nights, with such a moon; that there cannot possibly be such nights again. I am happy, and yet it's sad to think that the best is all behind me and can never return.

Olga. How do you know, Ninochka?

Nina [*surprised*]. But I can't be Vladimir's sweetheart all over again.

Olga [*slyly*]. Why just Vladimir's?

Nina [*looking at her in amazement, with sudden embarrassment*]. Mamma, what are you saying? It's ugly! I don't like it.

Olga [*amused at her embarrassment*]. Why ugly? Lots of things happen in the world. Suppose a war were suddenly to be declared, and Vladimir were to be killed — Heaven forbid! Then you'd marry again.

Nina. No, never. Even if Vladimir were killed, I would never marry again.

Olga. That's what they all say, Ninochka; but all

the same, when it comes to it, they do marry again and bear children.

NINA. Disgusting. How can a woman ever forget what has been, especially if the man she loved is killed? It's horrid.

OLGA. Of course it's horrid. But what is one to do? Bury oneself in a monastery? You cry and cry — and then you forget. One must live some way.

NINA. I don't see why it's so absolutely necessary. And then, even if I should marry again, I should feel miserable and awkward.

OLGA. It only seems so to you now, Ninochka.

NINA. No, it doesn't only seem so; I know it. How can one feel the same way a second time? No matter how much I loved my second husband, I'd always be remembering and comparing! No, it's ugly.

OLGA. There is nothing ugly about it.

NINA. It *is* ugly. Anyway, I think it would be far better to fall in love and then die, than to have to return again to a dull, prosaic, every-day existence.

OLGA. If that's the way you take it, then life isn't worth living.

NINA. Perhaps it isn't.

OLGA. And yet here have we been living together, your father and I, and have both grown old, and still we have no desire to die.

NINA. Oh, you; that's different.

OLGA. You only think it's different.

NINA. Why only think? What do you mean?

OLGA. Exactly what I say. You imagine it's different, but it isn't. It's because you have no children. When you get children, you'll settle down at once.

NINA [*blushing*]. I shall never have children.

OLGA. And, pray, why not?

NINA. Because — because I don't like children.

Olga. You don't like them because you haven't got them. When I was young, I, too, thought I didn't like children; but when I lost my Sandy, I nearly went crazy.

Silence.

Nina. Still, it's all very sad.

Olga. Sad, sad! — You had better put more clothes on, or you'll catch cold.

Nina. Now, Mother! how can one catch cold in such weather?

Olga [*insistently*]. This is just the kind of weather one is apt to catch cold in.

Katya [*appearing on the steps*]. The master is calling you.

Olga. I am coming; I am coming. [*She straightens herself, shakes her hands, smoothes down her gray hair, and goes quickly into the house.*] Really Ninochka, you had better put something on. I'll have Katya get you a jacket. Yes? Shall I?

Nina. Why, Mamma, upon my word!

Olga. See here, Nina, you'll catch cold, and then you'll be coughing like Senya Semyonov. [*She goes out, accompanied by Katya.*]

Nina [*sitting alone on the steps, all bathed in the sunlight, smiles gently and brightly at some thought that passes through her mind*]. Oh, how good!

She folds her hands behind her head, stretches her supple body languidly, looks once more into the blossoming garden, and walks slowly into the house.

It is quiet. The sun is shining. Somewhere in the garden, the sparrows chirp roguishly. Asya Kachalova and Semyonov appear at the gate, Asya in a light dress and with a light sunshade in her hand, Semyonov in a student's coat buttoned to the chin, notwithstanding the warm weather, and with a stout, crooked cane hang-

ing from a button. He carries Asya's book in his hands.

SEMYONOV. Volodya is still in bed fast asleep, I suppose.

ASYA. Why, it's one o'clock already.

SEMYONOV. What does he care? Go in and see. I'll wait here. If I go in, Piotr Ivanovich will start off again on the war of seventy-seven.

ASYA [*laughing*]. All right. Sit down. I'll be back soon. [*She mounts the steps lightly and rapidly and enters the house.*]

SEMYONOV [*he is homely and thin, and his face is drawn by suffering. He sits down on the bench under the tree, and coughs drily*]. Yes, that's the way. [*He beats the tip of his shoe lightly with his cane.*] It's a rotten deal I am getting, though — yes, a rotten deal. [*He whistles quietly, tapping the ground with his cane, and hanging his head. Vladimir Aleksandrovich, back from the drill, enters from the street.*]

VLADIMIR. Ah, Semyon Nikolayevich! How do you do? All alone here! Where are the others?

SEMYONOV. I don't know. I've just come.

VLADIMIR. Why don't you come in, then? They're having coffee, I suppose.

SEMYONOV. No, thanks; I'd rather stay here. I am bored to death by the war of 1877.

VLADIMIR [*laughing*]. Well, well! I didn't know Piotr Ivanovich had made you his victim too.

SEMYONOV [*with an expression of horror*]. I tell you, it's frightful. Whew!

VLADIMIR. Piotr Ivanovich is an eccentric. Very well, then, if you wish to stay here, I'll send Volodya to keep you company. [*As he goes into the house, he calls.*] Sidorenko!

Semyonov whistles quietly and taps his cane.

ASYA [*comes out on the terrace, beaming with joy*].

Why, Volodya has really just got up. What a lazy fellow!

SEMYONOV [*bitterly*]. He's a darling!

ASYA [*turning a quick glance upon him*]. You are horrid, Senya.

SEMYONOV. Not at all. It only hurts me to see you so much in love.

ASYA [*bursting out*]. What makes you think that?

SEMYONOV. For a woman to go off into raptures over a man's sleeping till one o'clock in the afternoon is a very bad sign indeed. To my mind sleeping till one o'clock is just plain dissipation and nothing else.

ASYA [*pouting, and going into the garden*]. You are jealous because other people are in good health and you —

SEMYONOV [*bitterly*]. That's cruel, Aleksandra Ivanovna.

ASYA [*flinging herself towards him, penitently*]. Forgive me, Senya. I did not mean to offend you. Don't be angry.

SEMYONOV [*without looking at her*]. I am not angry. What business have I to be angry? You are perfectly right. It *is* jealousy — though no wonder a man's jealous to see everybody and everything around him blooming, rejoicing, making love, and himself dying.

ASYA. Senya, don't talk that way. You mustn't.

SEMYONOV. Why? It's true. I am dying; that's all there is to it. [*Asya looks at him with pity, at a loss what to say.*]

SEMYONOV [*without looking at her, and tapping his cane as before*]. Yes, such is the law of nature, and there's no help for it. As a matter of fact, it is all quite natural, quite in conformity with the purpose of nature. Only it's a damn shame that Nature in following out her purpose should have fixed just upon me, the devil take it! However, someone has got to die — if not I, then

someone else. And I shouldn't gain so very much if I were to live twenty years more.

ASYA. Why are you so bitter against life, Senya?

SEMYONOV. What has life given me, Asya? If I were as strong as your Volodya, and if I were loved by a girl like you, then I too would sing hosannahs. But, as it is, it isn't worth while, upon my word! [*With an unnatural smile.*] Fall in love with me, Asya, yes?

ASYA. What nonsense! [*In her embarrassment, she begins to draw circles around her with her sun-shade.*]

SEMYONOV. To you it's nonsense; but to me —

ASYA. It's nonsense to you, too.

SEMYONOV. Not quite. In your relations to Volodya, I —

ASYA [*interrupting him*]. First of all, what has that got to do with you?

SEMYONOV [*with a bitter smile*]. Absolutely nothing. [*After a silence.*] And yet it's all extremely unjust.

ASYA. What is?

SEMYONOV. Everything. Why are things given to one and taken away from another? Here is Volodya, and here am I. He has an iron constitution, health, love. He has life before him, and he has the joy of living. Like all people in good health, he is happy just to be alive. And I have nothing except tuberculosis and the prospect of dying a perhaps painful death in the near future.

ASYA. Again, Senya!

SEMYONOV. It's a fact, Aleksandra Ivanovna. You can't get away from it. In my opinion, it would be fairer by far if you loved, not Volodya, but me.

ASYA. Again! Aren't you sick of it, Senya?

SEMYONOV. I am — and have been for a long time — and yet — [*In an unnatural, ironical tone.*] It would really be much more poetical if, instead of loving Volodya, you would cheer and beautify the last days of

my life. This way, what is it? You will marry, bear children —

Asya. You are talking nonsense, Mr. Semyonov, and are insolent besides.

Semyonov [*sàdly*]. I know it! Forgive me, Asya; I really feel very ill.

Asya [*softening at once*]. I am not angry, but you mustn't speak about it.

There is a silence. Asya bends over towards the flowers and smells them. Semyonov looks at her, and, as he looks, his face gradually assumes an angry expression.

Semyonov [*with a sinister smile*]. But my, how desperately in love you are, Asya!

Asya [*quickly drawing herself up*]. This is getting to be intolerable, really.

Semyonov [*laughing maliciously*]. I am a fool. Why should I have asked your pardon? What for? You are in love; you enjoy life; you are happy. But why should I respect your happiness? Why should I be glad of it? [*Rising and flourishing his cane.*] I spit upon your happiness and upon your love; I have a right not only to refuse to respect your love; I have a right to be jealous of you, to hate you, despise you, ridicule you — anything I please. You happy people should be thankful to us unhappy ones that we tolerate your happiness.— All right. Live, enjoy yourselves, love each other, think that the whole world was created for nothing but your pleasure, be fruitful and multiply, and — be damned! Goodby! [*He turns abruptly and goes out of the garden.. Asya looks after him, frightened and surprised. Volodya enters.*]

Volodya [*on the terrace*]. Semyonov, where are you going? Hello, Asya. [*He runs down to her and presses her hand hard.*] Semyonov!

Semyonov [*turning around for a moment, bitterly*]. Go to the devil!

He goes out. A silence ensues.

Volodya. What's the matter? What's happened?

Asya [*embarrassed*]. I don't know, really. He is so queer.

Volodya. Yes; isn't it a pity? His sickness has soured him. Oh, well, it's nothing,— a momentary fit. He gets attacks like that now and then, but he is a fine fellow at bottom. [*He takes Asya's hand.*] How well you look today, Asya!

Asya [*laughing*]. You tell me the same thing each time.

Volodya [*taking her other hand also*]. Don't you like it? Don't you? [*Bending his head and looking into her eyes.*] Don't you like it, Asya? [*Katya comes out on the terrace and shakes the tablecloth.*]

Volodya [*letting go of Asya's hands and looking at Katya; in an unnatural tone of voice*]. Have you been to the library today?

Asya [*confused*]. Yes, I got you — [*Frightened.*] He carried off my books.

Volodya. Who?

Asya. Senya. I got the novels for you, but he has taken them away.

Katya goes out.

Volodya. Never mind; he'll bring them back. Come into the garden, Asya.

Asya [*with a shy look*]. What for?

Volodya. Just for a little walk.

Asya [*shyly shaking her head and closing her eyes*].

Volodya. Why not?

Asya [*suddenly lowering her eyes, in an undertone*]. You'll begin to speak about that again.

Volodya. About what? [*He takes her hand.*] About what, Asya?

Asya [*making a slight effort to pull her hand away*]. Why, about that . . .

Volodya. What's the use of talking? Don't I love you, Asya?

Asya. Is that love?

Volodya [*passionately*]. Yes, of course. You are a *woman,* Asya. Why shouldn't I speak about it? Anyway, it's got to come sooner or later.

Asya [*lowering her eyes*]. No, it never will.

Volodya. Yes, it will! It will! [*He seizes her hand in a tight pressure and draws her to him.*] Asya!

Asya. Volodya, Volodya, you have gone out of your mind!

Sidorenko enters from the garden with a watering-can in his hand; they fly apart.

Volodya [*confused*]. What do you want?

Sidorenko [*frightened*]. Nothing, Mr. Volodya. I — I was going to water the flowers.

Volodya. You'll do it some other time. Vladimir Aleksandrovich wants you.

Sidorenko. Yes, sir. [*He sets the can near the flowers and slowly passes into the house.*]

Asya [*in a low voice*]. Let's go away somewhere, Volodya.

Volodya [*slyly*]. Where to?

Asya [*blushing and smiling, and looking at him with bright, loving eyes*]. Well, into the garden, if you want to; it's all the same.

Volodya [*rapturously*]. My dear girl, my sweetheart!

Asya. Only please, Volodya, not like yesterday. . . . You mustn't . . .

VOLODYA. Why mustn't I?

ASYA. You mustn't, and that's all. It's bad.

Volodya suddenly flings his arms around her and kisses her.

ASYA [*struggling to free herself and frightened*]. Volodya, Volodya! You are mad. Let me go! [*For a moment she remains still, abandoning herself to his kisses, then tears herself away, looks at him with happy, mist-covered eyes, and runs into the garden, Volodya following her.*]

The stage is empty. Sidorenko comes out of the house, takes the can, yawns, crosses to the other side, and goes out. Nina and Vladimir enter.

NINA. Where are our young people?

VLADIMIR. I don't know. They were here a few minutes ago. They must have gone into the garden.

NINA [*sitting down on the top step*]. I feel so happy today. Maybe it's because the sun is so bright.

VLADIMIR [*seating himself next to her on the broad stone balustrade*]. And maybe it's because I love you. [*He takes her hand, kisses it, and puts it on his knee.*] My dear, sweet Nina!

NINA [*laughing*]. We are all dear and sweet.

VLADIMIR [*after a short silence, stroking her hand*]. It's good to be living in the world, after all.

NINA [*thoughtfully*]. Sometimes too good, even.

VLADIMIR. Why too good?

NINA. Because — it's awful.

VLADIMIR. Awful?

NINA. Yes, awful! Nothing is lasting. We know that things cannot continue the same forever.

VLADIMIR [*catching her thought*]. Oh!

NINA [*seizing his hand and looking at him wide-eyed*]. So that when you know your happiness will not last forever, and that after happiness must come sorrow, you begin to feel so awful, awful!

VLADIMIR. Why think about it, Nina?

NINA. I don't know; it keeps running in my head. I am very, very happy, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR [*bending down and kissing her fingers*]. You are bored, darling. You know, I sometimes think I am committing a crime by living with you.

NINA. What are you talking about?

VLADIMIR. You see, I am such a simple, uninteresting fellow, I must bore you. You should have had a different kind of husband.

NINA [*putting her hand over his lips*]. Don't talk nonsense.

VLADIMIR [*kissing her hand and gently pulling it away*]. No, Nina; I'm not joking. Who am I? An ordinary, humdrum army officer, that's all, whereas you are a fine, clever, beautiful, unusual woman. You should have had a talented, educated, rich man for a husband, and you ought to live in a large city, meet lots of people, and shine in society. Why didn't you marry the Prince, Nina?

NINA [*laughing*]. Because I married you. That's all.

VLADIMIR [*a little jealous*]. He is much more of your sort than I am.

NINA. Vladimir, I'll get angry.

VLADIMIR. I won't any more; I won't. [*After a brief silence*]. Oh, it will be all right. Next fall I'll pass the examinations for the Academy, and then we'll move to St. Petersburg. Our whole life is still before us; isn't it, my little Nina?

NINA. Of course it is, dear.

VLADIMIR [*kissing her hand*]. My dear, precious Nina. We are still going to enjoy life. One must have faith, and work; that's all. You know, Nina, when I look at you, it seems to me that the sun shines only because you are here — [*Looking around.*] I hear someone coming.

Prince Voronetsky and Second Lieutenant Daue come in through the wicket gate.

VLADIMIR [*in involuntary excitement*]. The Prince again!

NINA [*hurriedly*]. Never mind. I'll say I am not feeling well.

VLADIMIR [*trying to conceal his excitement*]. No, don't. Why should you? [*Rising to meet the guests*]. How do you do, Prince! How are you, Daue! Is this a social call, or have you come on business?

DAUE. I am just coming from the office. Maksimych asked me to bring this to you. [*He hands him a paper.*] Good afternoon, Nina Petrovna. [*He kisses her hand.*] I've brought you a delightful piece of music. We'll play it together. [*The Prince silently kisses Nina's hand and salutes Vladimir Aleksandrovich.*]

VLADIMIR [*rapidly glancing over the paper*]. Daue, will you step into my room a moment? I'd like to talk to you. Prince, you'll excuse us, won't you?

PRINCE. Certainly.

VLADIMIR. We'll be back soon, Nina. Come, Daue.

Vladimir and Daue go into the house. During a silence Nina remains sitting, with a listless, indifferent air, and with her eyes turned away from the Prince.

PRINCE [*with a smirk.*] You seem to be angry with me, Nina Petrovna?

NINA [*coldly*]. I am not angry. I feel queer; that's all. I thought it was all at an end.

PRINCE [*his face darkening*]. But if I can't?

NINA [*coldly, shrugging her shoulders*]. I don't know. It's your affair. But if you really love me as you say, then you ought to spare me; you ought to leave me alone.

PRINCE [*quickly*]. So my presence excites you?

NINA. Not in the sense that you mean. It is simply unpleasant.

PRINCE. To whom? To you or your husband?

NINA [*haughtily*]. Please leave my husband out. What has my husband got to do with it? It's very disagreeable to me.

PRINCE. But why? Do tell me why?

NINA [*excitedly pulling at her handkerchief and not looking at him*]. You ought to understand, Prince. I respect you, hold you in high esteem as a man. But really it's time at last that you realized how exceedingly unpleasant it is to me [*growing irritated*] — these constant explanations, your dogged pursuit of me. It's all very tiresome and difficult, really.

PRINCE [*sadly, twirling his moustache and looking sidewise at her*]. It's your own fault, Nina Petrovna.

NINA [*in surprise*]. My fault? That's strange.

PRINCE. Yes, yours. Whose fault is it that no other woman exists for me beside you, that I think only of you, see only you? If your voice, your walk, the scent of your perfumes, even the rustle of your dress turn my head and drive me crazy, whose fault is it? Who did it?

NINA. I don't know. I certainly didn't mean to do it.

PRINCE [*bitterly*]. It isn't true.

NINA [*offended*]. Prince!

PRINCE. Yes, it's not true. You are not really what you can make yourself seem to be. You are just an ordinary woman, but you have acquired the art of seeming to be very different. Your hair lies on your head as on no other woman's, your walk excites, and your dress seems part of yourself, so that you produce the impression of being altogether out of the ordinary, a woman of rare beauty. But tell me frankly, when you stand for hours in front of the mirror, when you stretch and

massage and coddle your body, when you move, laugh, or dance, do you do it quite naturally, quite unconsciously, with absolutely no design?

NINA [*confused*]. An odd question! You've gone out of your mind, Prince.

PRINCE. Maybe. I sometimes think so myself.

Silence.

NINA [*agitated, without looking at him*]. Perhaps you are right. [*The Prince utters a short, queer chuckle. Nina gives him a quick, almost frightened look.*] All right, if you insist; it's partly my own fault. I shouldn't have allowed it to come to this. I have enough sense not to be insulted at being told the truth, and enough courage to admit it. There once was a time when I tried to please you.

PRINCE [*sarcastically*]. Once?

NINA [*greatly agitated*]. Well, yes, and afterwards, too, I didn't always act as I should have. But, after all, I am only a woman,— just an ordinary woman, as you say. I am to blame,— but now it's all at an end.

PRINCE [*somberly*]. It cannot end this way, Nina Petrovna.

NINA [*in distress*]. But understand me, for heaven's sake! — I don't want to — You are torturing me.— I love my husband!

PRINCE [*obstinately*]. What do I care about that?

NINA. But I implore you! [*In sudden anger.*] But what do you mean by this? Can you force me? I have a right to demand that you let me alone.

PRINCE. This is a question about which I could say a lot to you, Nina Petrovna. But your people are coming. Another time.

Both are silent. Vladimir and Daue walk down from the terrace.

VLADIMIR. So your mind is quite made up?

DAUE. Oh, yes; I'll leave the regiment in August and enter the Conservatory next fall.

VLADIMIR. We'll meet in St. Petersburg, then.

DAUE. You'll be in the Academy?

VLADIMIR. I hope so. [*Walking up to Nina and the Prince.*] Here we are again.

DAUE [*gleefully*]. Well, Nina Petrovna, shall we play that piece now?

NINA [*distracted, not having yet completely regained her composure*]. What piece? — Oh, yes — of course.

DAUE. I brought the music with me, too. [*With animation.*] I am very anxious to play it for you. It's so bright and sunny.

PRINCE [*glumly*]. Daue seems to be in love with Nina Petrovna.

DAUE [*with quiet ease*]. Oh, no. If I am in love with anything it's with music.

PRINCE. Get out! I don't believe you.

DAUE. Upon my word! You know, I often wonder how one can fall in love with women, suffer, and plague one's self on account of them, when there is music in the world. To my mind, the most beautiful woman in existence is not worth a single Beethoven sonata.

VLADIMIR. It seems to me that the whole world and all that is in it is not worth as much to you as that Beethoven sonata. How did you ever come to be an officer, Daue?

DAUE. I have always thought it strange myself. You see, I never dared to dream that I could be a real musician. I thought a real musician was something extraordinary. I had to choose an ordinary occupation. My father was a soldier; so I became a soldier, too. But I am going to leave now. My mind is positively made up. I'll devote myself entirely to music, and I

think I can still turn out to be something. [*He looks round, smiling diffidently.*]

VLADIMIR. I have no doubt of it.

DAUE [*a-quiver with impatience*]. Well, Nina Petrovna?

NINA. I am ready.— You stay here and listen.

VLADIMIR. All right. Will you have a cigarette, Prince?

Nina and Daue go into the house.

VLADIMIR [*lighting a cigarette*]. He is a remarkable man — Daue is. Nothing exists for him outside of music.

PRINCE [*mechanically, thinking of something else*]. Yes — he is a talented chap.

VLADIMIR. When there was talk of war last year, Daue was in despair. It was distressing to see him. And it wasn't because he is a coward, but because for him to give up his violin is like giving up his life. [*Musing.*] But every one of us has something he holds especially dear.

There is a pause. The tuning of a violin and the sounds of a piano along with the tuning are heard coming from the house.

VLADIMIR. Yes, every one has something which he values above everything else. And yet, let war be declared, and we'd all drop what's dearest to us and go out to kill and die. Come to think of it, it's queer, isn't it? But we'd do it, just the same. Yes, we'd go. And Daue would be among the first. He'd drop his violin and go with the rest.

PRINCE [*mechanically*]. Yes, it's so, of course.

Olga and Piotr come out on the balcony.

OLGA. The Prince is here, too. Good afternoon.

Ninochka and Daue are going to give us some music. Let's listen.

PIOTR [*with an air of lively satisfaction*]. I like to hear them play. I always listen to them with great pleasure. Daue is a genuine musician. In our regiment there was an officer who —

OLGA [*sitting down on the stoop*]. Hush, Piotr. Listen.

Daue plays a bright, cheerful melody on the violin, accompanied by Nina. All listen. Olga nods her head in time to the music. Vladimir smiles with satisfaction. But the Prince listens with an expression of pain on his face. Asya and Volodya come in at the sound of the music. They greet the Prince from a distance, and stop short.

PIOTR. Wonderful. What is it?

OLGA [*annoyed, motioning him to keep quiet*]. Sh-sh, Piotr; don't talk.

The music rises to a high, joyous note and stops.

ALL. Bravo! Bravo, Daue! Encore! [*There is general animation. Asya and Volodya cross over to the others.*]

ASYA. What a beautiful piece! What is it? I've never heard it before. It's exquisite! Once more, once more. [*She runs into the house.*] Play it again, please, Nina Petrovna.

OLGA [*reproachfully*]. Out here again without your cap, Piotr.

PIOTR. For heaven's sake! Let me alone, please. Do me the favor, won't you?

OLGA. A favor, yes. And if you catch cold, who will look after you?

Piotr Ivanovich throws up his hands in despair. All laugh.

VLADIMIR. I didn't know Asya was here. She is a dear girl. Nina is very fond of her, too.

OLGA. Everybody likes her.

VLADIMIR [*with a twinkle in his eyes*]. And Volodya more than anybody else.

OLGA. Thank God for that. We'll marry them, and then we'll all live together even more nicely than before. We must marry off the Prince, too. You ought to find yourself a nice, good girl, Prince, and marry; and then you and your wife would be coming to see us and have tea with us, and all would be just right. It would be so nice.

PRINCE [*with a scarcely perceptible touch of irony*]. I am afraid it would turn out to be too nice.

Daue plays again. All are silent.

CURTAIN

ACT II

A few weeks later.

It is the dining-room in the house of Piotr. The table is spread for a farewell luncheon. A door on the right leads to the hallway in which Sidorenko is locking and strapping up trunks. The bell rings. Sidorenko opens the door, admitting Asya and Semyonov. Asya takes off her hat, Semyonov hangs up his overcoat, and both enter the dining-room.

ASYA. Nobody in. We had better wait here, Senya. I suppose they are not thinking about us now. They have enough to occupy them.

SEMYONOV. All right, let's wait. [*He sits down at the window and lights a cigarette.*]

ASYA. Smoking again, Senya? That's bad for you.

SEMYONOV. What's the difference? I'll die if I smoke, and I'll die if I don't. I can't last much longer, no matter what I do.

Asya nervously paces the room, smoothing down a wrinkled corner of the tablecloth, and gazing through the window.

SEMYONOV. Why are you so nervous, Asya?

ASYA. I don't know. I can't get it into my head. It's all so unexpected.

SEMYONOV. Unexpected? Hardly. On the contrary, it was to be expected long ago. Do you think the Germans have been preparing for war these forty years for their own private satisfaction, eh?

Asya. I didn't mean it that way. You could have told it was coming, I suppose; you know about such things; but to me it would have been unexpected, no matter when it came. I can't imagine how people can make up their minds to such a horror. The misery and tears it has brought into almost every home! In the whole city there isn't one who hasn't some relative or some dear friend to take leave of. The soldiers are so jolly, and they sing as they go. Even the officers look as though they are glad. But my heart contracts when I think of the many of them that are doomed to death and terrible agony and suffering. And yet you know, Senya, I don't feel so sorry for those who leave for the front as for those who stay behind. Why, it's terrible to see those you love go off to war. How many of them will never return! Yet every one of them has a mother, a wife, children. What must they be feeling now! What will they be thinking all the time! How many tears they will shed! — No; it's terrible, terrible! It's easier to die oneself.

Semyonov. For some it is; for some it isn't. It all depends.

Silence.

Asya. Poor Nina! Poor Vladimir! And how he looked forward to entering the Academy next fall and going to St. Petersburg and beginning a new life! Nina cries and cries all the time; she never stops.

Semyonov. Yes, it's a bad business. Take care that you don't have to be weeping, too.

Asya [*stopping short, frightened*]. I? What for?

Semyonov. Volodya might go off to the war, and then you'll be left behind, a straw widow.

Asya. Volodya isn't in the army.

Semyonov. He'll go as a volunteer. He is a strong, healthy chap. All are going. Why shouldn't he?

Asya. You are not going?

Semyonov. I? I, too? The trouble is, I'd get no farther than the first hospital. So it's hardly worth while — But why are you so frightened?

Asya [*confused*]. It's impossible. You are saying it just to frighten me.

Semyonov. Not a bit of it. He told me so himself, yesterday. And I think it would be a fine thing for him to do. Why, even Daue is going.

Asya [*impatiently*]. What do I care about Daue?

Semyonov [*spitefully*]. There you are. You are all heroines until it strikes home. It's Daue, and none but Daue, that I'm sorry for. He is worth all the Volodyas in the world put together. If Daue should be killed, it would be a genuine loss.

Asya. You are not sorry for the others?

Semyonov. For some I am; for others I am not. For your Volodya, for example, I am not. Upon my word, I'm not.

Asya [*indignantly*]. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Senya?

Semyonov. Why should I be? It is only to you that he is so precious. But for humanity to be minus one Volodya is really no great loss.

Asya. Why, he is your friend.

Semyonov [*darkly*]. I have no friends.

Asya. So much the worse for you.

Semyonov. Perhaps. But try to look at it objectively. All right; Volodya remains at home, goes through the university, becomes an instructor in mathematics, marries you, begets children. What boredom! Is it worth being born into the world for that?

Asya. But to be killed or crippled in war, it is?

Semyonov. One may get run over by a motor or trolley. War at least is life, fight. I'd honestly advise him to go.

ASYA [*her whole body trembles, as she fixes him with a look of hatred*]. Yes, I know; it's you who put the idea into his head, you who advised him to go. It was an ugly, mean thing to do.

SEMYONOV. Why was it mean? Is it mean to advise a man to go and defend his country?

ASYA [*embarrassed*]. I didn't mean that — And you — [*She suddenly covers her face with her hands, and goes towards the door.*]

SEMYONOV. Asya, don't run away. [*Asya pays no attention to him, and goes out.*] Well, as you please. [*He shrugs his shoulders and absent-mindedly pokes his already extinguished cigarette into the ash-tray.*] Yes, yes; that's the way.— And you, Sidorenko, you are going, too?

SIDORENKO. Yes, sir.

SEMYONOV. Aren't you afraid?

SIDORENKO [*smiling*]. Of course I am. It's no joke. But I am sorry more for her as is left at home.

SEMYONOV. At home? What home?

SIDORENKO. My home, sir, of course. I have a wife, living in the village, and of course she is a foolish woman, and she cries and carries on. Naturally, I feel sorry. But, just the same, maybe it's all right. We'll get back all right, if God means us to. Perhaps it looks so awful only from a distance. [*He slams the trunk lid shut and carries it over to one side. The bell rings and he opens the door. Daue enters, in khaki, carrying a violin case in his hand. He crosses into the dining-room.*]

DAUE. Good morning, Semyon Nikolayevich. You have come to say good-by to us, too? [*Holding out his hand to him.*] That's fine. I thought I shouldn't have a chance to see you again before I left.

SEMYONOV. So you are going?

DAUE [*laying the violin case on the table, with a*

slight shrug]. What's to be done? It's got to be.

SEMYONOV. But you were going to leave the army, weren't you?

DAUE. Oh, yes, I was. It's too late now, though. Fate has decreed otherwise, it seems. [*He laughs.*] Written in the Book of Life, I suppose; or is it in the Book of Death? — Besides, I'd feel ashamed — everybody going, and I staying here and scraping on the fiddle. No; if we are to die, then let's die together. [*With a sigh.*] Yes, I guess I shall have to give it up. Here is my violin. I've brought it here to ask Nina Petrovna to keep it for me. It's a fine instrument, very expensive. Maybe I won't get killed, after all.

SEMYONOV. You won't; I am sure of it.

DAUE. We shall see. And if they do kill me — well, what of it? There'll be one poor fiddler the less in the world. One must die some time, anyway. I'd only like to make sure about the violin. It would be a pity to lose it.

SEMYONOV. Don't worry about the violin. It will be taken good care of here.

DAUE. Thank you. I rely on Nina Petrovna. She loves music herself, and she has always treated me well.

Vladimir comes in, also in khaki, looking sad and preoccupied. He forgets that he has not yet seen Semyonov, and greets only Daue.

VLADIMIR. Good morning, Daue. Well? — I sent for you, but you weren't at home.

DAUE. I have been running about the city the whole morning, trying to get my affairs in order. Thank God, it's all settled now. I sold my piano to Kokhanovsky. The only thing left is the violin.

VLADIMIR [*absent-mindedly*]. Oh, the violin. [*He*

puts out his hand towards the violin, but the next moment forgets about it]. What a crowd there was in the church today!

SEMYONOV. Good morning, Vladimir Aleksandrovich.

VLADIMIR. Oh, excuse me; I didn't see you. Glad to see you! Thanks very much for coming. [*Recollecting himself.*] But why don't you come into the next room, gentlemen? They are all in there — the Prince is here.

DAUE. The Prince has come, too?

VLADIMIR [*with an exaggerated air of indifference*]. Yes; he has come to see us off. Come, gentlemen. [*Smiling faintly.*] I see you are holding on to your violin and won't let go of it.

DAUE. I want to ask Nina to put it away for me in some safe place. It's a very good one, and very expensive, you know. It would be a pity for something to happen to it.

VLADIMIR [*without hearing what he has said*]. Yes, it would be a pity. Well, then, come in. [*He turns round abruptly, and goes out without waiting for them. Semyonov and Daue go out after him. There is a pause. Katya enters, and places beer and wine on the table. Asya and Volodya come in quickly. On seeing Katya, they stop short.*]

VOLODYA. Please leave the room for a moment, Katya.

KATYA. Yes, sir. [*She goes out through the antechamber, whispering something to Sidorenko on the way, and Sidorenko passes out after her.*]

VOLODYA [*following them with his eyes until they are gone*]. I have been meaning to have a talk with you for some time. Of course you, as a woman, can't understand, but, really, a fellow is ashamed to stay at home when all are leaving.

Asya [*suppressing her tears*]. Not all. There is Senya. He is staying behind, and so is the Prince.

Volodya. Senya! Senya is an invalid. And as for the Prince, he is a well-fed animal who has had a disappointment in love and hugs his tragedy, which is dearer to him than the whole world. Asya, you won't keep me from doing what I feel I ought to do, will you?

Asya [*through her tears*]. How can I keep you?

Volodya [*frightened*]. Now there! What are you crying about, Asya? Dear me! Look at you now! Why, it isn't settled yet! It's by no means certain that I am going. Maybe I won't go. So far it's nothing but an idea.

Asya [*incredulously*]. You are only saying that to cheer me, but I feel that — [*She breaks into sobs.*]

Volodya. Asya! aren't you ashamed? I give you my word of honor, I haven't made up my mind yet.

Asya [*with a glimmer of hope*]. Are you telling me the truth?

Volodya. Of course I am telling you the truth. Upon my word, Asya! Don't cry; it's bad enough as it is.

Asya. I won't, any more. [*Smiling through her tears.*] It's Senya's fault. He frightened me. I know it's stupid. Don't be angry with me.

Volodya. I couldn't be angry with you if I tried, Asya.

Asya. Couldn't you? Then it's all right; then I'll get over it soon. You see, it's all gone already. I am perfectly calm again. [*She laughs through her tears.*] I am a goose.

Volodya. No; you are not a goose — you are a dear. [*He takes her hands and puts them on his shoulders.*] Asya, suppose I really went to the war — would you — would you in that case agree — h'm — to be my wife?

Asya. What? [*She regards him with tenderness, then suddenly kisses him and runs away.*]

Volodya. Asya! [*Asya runs into Olga in the doorway.*]

Olga [*distracted, her face discolored from weeping*]. Where are you going, Asya? We'll have lunch soon. Don't go. They are leaving us, Asya. It's terrible, isn't it?

Asya [*not yet recovered from the excitement of the kiss*]. Yes — I'll be back soon. [*She disappears through the door. Volodya sits down at the window and lights a cigarette. Olga goes over to him and gently strokes his hair.*]

Olga. Ah, Volodya, Volodya! What is this war for? Can you tell me? What is it for? I don't understand it. Here we were, living quietly, and all of a sudden! — I am so sorry for Nina.

Volodya takes her hand and kisses it, without replying.

Olga. But maybe nothing will happen, after all? Eh, Volodya?

Volodya. How so? The war has begun already, Mamma.

Olga. I know it has. But maybe they'll settle it somehow over there. They'll just take a look at each other, and they'll say, "We are fools — that's what we are!" Then they'll break up and go each his own way.

Volodya [*involuntarily smiling*]. Things don't happen that way, Mamma.

Olga. But it's such a pity, Volodya. It's raining and wet outside. They might all catch cold there. God forbid! I think the best thing would be if they just dropped the whole business and went home.

Volodya. It's not so simple.

Olga. But it would be better if it were simple.

VOLODYA. Oh, better! That doesn't count. Mother, would you let me go?

OLGA. Where?

VOLODYA. There,— to the war.

OLGA [*angrily*]. What! You too? Aren't there enough? What are you talking about? Do you imagine I'll let you go?

VOLODYA. I'll go of myself.

OLGA [*indignantly throwing up her hands*]. Don't talk nonsense, please. My heart is sore enough as it is. However such a thing could have come into your head! Just you wait; I'll tell Asya. She'll give it to you for talking such rubbish. [*Volodya laughs.*] He laughs! The idea! He thinks it's funny,— a matter to laugh about. Piotr says that if he were younger he'd go, too. What has come over you, for heaven's sake? You all act as though you had gone crazy. [*She goes to the table, aggrieved.*] You'd better go and tell them to come to lunch. Vladimir has to leave soon, and if they don't hurry, he'll have to go away hungry.

Volodya goes out, and soon returns with Piotr, the Prince, Daue and Semyonov.

OLGA. Sit down, gentlemen. Sit down, Daue, my boy. I have made you your favorite dish,— cutlets. Eat for your health. No one will make cutlets for you out there. And then you will remember me.

DAUE. I will not forget you, even without the cutlets.

PIOTR. Where are Nina and Vladimir?

SEMYONOV. They'll be here in a moment.

OLGA. Eat; help yourselves, please. Will you have some whiskey, Prince? — Piotr?

Nina and Vladimir come in. Nina's eyes are red from crying.

OLGA. Sit down here, Ninochka,— Vladimir!

PIOTR [*picking up a flask*]. Vladimir, will you have a drink? — Will you, Daue?

DAUE. I think I will — although —

Asya enters quietly and takes a seat at the end of the table farthest removed from Volodya. She tries not to look at him.

OLGA. Drink, drink. It will keep you in good condition for the journey. Else you might catch cold — God forbid. It's a long way.

PRINCE. Are you going on horseback?

DAUE. Yes, to the station.

PRINCE. When does the train leave?

DAUE. They say at six o'clock. But I don't believe it'll start till much later.

PRINCE [*making a conscious effort to keep up the conversation*]. Strange, a large town like ours, with soldiers always stationed here, and no railroad in case of emergency. Such a state of things can exist only in Russia.

SEMYONOV. I know a city, one of our government capitals, with a population of more than one hundred thousand, and the nearest railway station is about sixty miles away.

PIOTR. They are going to begin to build a railroad here next year. The engineers have already come to make the preliminary survey. Yes, nowadays things are different. In 1877, when we marched to the frontier —

OLGA. Now, now! We have heard the story before.

PIOTR. Upon my word! What does it mean? Why can't I tell —

Nina begins to weep quietly; Vladimir throws a quick glance at her, and hangs his head.

OLGA. Ninochka, don't! It's enough — Why do

you go on that way, really? You are only upsetting Vladimir.

NINA [*hurriedly*]. It's nothing — it's only — nervousness. [*With a queer, nervous smile.*] Yet I can't help thinking it's awfully funny. Really, just funny.

Everyone tries to avoid looking at her, pretending to be occupied with preparations for the journey. Vladimir hangs his head still lower.

OLGA [*cautiously*]. Shall I give you some medicine drops?

NINA [*starting*]. What for? You think I am getting hysterical, Mamma? No; it's not that. It really struck me as funny all of a sudden, that's all. Look at Daue, for example.— Where is your violin, Daue?

DAUE. I just meant to ask you to —

NINA [*not listening to him*]. Can't you see what a terrible comedy it is? Somewhere, in some place, there is a Wilhelm, a Germany. You have never seen Germany, Daue. Neither have I. And yet we are all crying, taking leave of each other, breaking up our lives completely. Daue is going to the war! Isn't it ridiculous? Do you want to go to war, Daue?

DAUE. It isn't a question of my personal wish, Nina Petrovna. Everybody is going.

NINA [*with hectic irritation*]. Everybody! What do you care about everybody?

OLGA. Don't you think you had better take some valerian, Ninochka? I'll bring it to you; will you take it,— yes?

NINA [*with growing unnatural excitement*]. Oh, Mamma, let me alone! What do you want of me? I want to say —

OLGA [*with tears*]. Ninochka, my dear girl!

NINA [*pushing her mother aside*]. I have my life to live. I don't interfere with anybody. I don't harm

anybody. It may be a small, insignificant life I am leading, but I don't want anybody to mar and destroy it. No, I don't!

Olga [*patting her vigorously on the head*]. But what's to be done, Ninochka? You are not the only one. Everybody is hit by it in the same way as you.

Nina. Is it my fault? That's their business. I don't want to have my life sacrificed to anybody.

Piotr [*quite unexpectedly*]. Only people without a country can speak that way, Nina!

Olga. Oh, leave her alone, Piotr. As if you don't see that —

Piotr [*without listening, and not understanding*]. Only Russia's enemies can speak that way. [*Striking the table with his fist.*] In such a time as this we have no right to speak about our own personal life. We have no right to argue and reason.

Olga. Piotr! Piotr!

Piotr. We must all go and die, and we mustn't reason about it. I am an old man, but, should it become necessary, I will go without question, because the whole of Russia, my country, needs my life. What are you in comparison to the destiny of Russia? I will not permit it. No one in my house shall dare to —

Olga [*shouting*]. Piotr!

Nina [*in a subdued voice*]. I know, I know, Papa dear. [*She weeps.*]

Olga [*vexed and in tears*]. Ah, Piotr, you always jump in like that! Good heavens!

Piotr [*embarrassed*]. What did I do? I am only saying that — in a time such as Russia is going through now —

Olga. Oh, go along; stop it. Ninochka, calm yourself. You mustn't go on that way.— Vladimir!

Nina. I'll soon get over it — I only just — Don't pay any attention to me. It will pass away.

A long, oppressive silence follows.

SEMYONOV [*with studied simplicity*]. Will you have some beer, Daue?

OLGA. Will anyone have tea? I have had the samovar prepared. Prince, will you have a glass of tea?

PRINCE. No, thank you.

There is silence again. Suddenly Nina rises and walks out. All remain silent, following her with their eyes.

OLGA. You had better go to her, Vladimir. Go on, my dear.

VLADIMIR. Yes.— Excuse me, gentlemen.

SEMYONOV. Certainly, certainly.

Vladimir gets up and leaves quickly.

PRINCE [*after a pause*]. Yes, it's hard for those who have near ones.

DAUE [*in an unnaturally buoyant voice*]. I am all right. I have nothing except my violin. If I get killed, it won't play by itself. [*He laughs.*]

SEMYONOV [*with an artificial smile*]. Yes, that's so.

SIDORENKO [*appearing in the door*]. The quartermaster has just run in, sir, and said that the commander has arrived.

DAUE. Already? [*He rises quickly and looks at the clock.*] Yes, it's really time. We are late. I'll have to hurry.

All get up and make hurried motions, not knowing what to do.

DAUE. Yes — so we are off. [*He hesitates a mo-*

ment, smiles awkwardly, then, with a resolute shake of the head.] Well — now — Goodby, Olga Petrovna. Thank you for everything. [*He kisses her hand.*]

Olga [*with tears, kissing him on the forehead*]. Goodby, my boy, goodby. God grant that you return home alive and sound.

Daue [*with a show of boldness*]. We'll get back, with the help of God. Not everybody is going to be killed, you know. Goodby, Piotr Ivanovich. Let me kiss you — maybe we'll never see each other again.

Piotr. Now, now! Why goodby? Goodby!

Daue. All right, goodby. Everything is possible. — Well, Volodya, are you going to the station with us? That's good. Goodby, Prince. I wish you all the very best for yourselves. And now — Where is Nina Petrovna? I suppose she has no time to think of me now. Tell her goodby for me, and give her my thanks for everything. Let her remember sometimes how we made music together. I have been meaning to ask her to take care of my violin. It's a very good, very expensive violin.

Olga. Don't worry about the violin, Daue. We'll keep it safe for you. *You* just come back safe and sound. You are going to perform some fine concerts for us still with Ninochka, I am sure.

Daue [*with a faint smile*]. Hardly. It's all over with my music. [*Throwing up his hands.*] Oh, well, it's all the same. I haven't said goodby to you yet, Aleksandra Ivanovna. I wish you a happy life, Miss Aleksandra.

Asya remains silent, weeping.

Daue. What else was it I wanted to say? No — nothing. Goodby once more.

All. Goodby! Goodby! A safe return!

DAUE [*stopping abruptly at the door, with an embarrassed smile*]. You won't laugh at me, will you? — I'd like to take another look at it. [*He opens the violin case, but instantly slaps it shut again. Flinging up his hands.*] Oh, nonsense. Goodby for good now. Thank you all.

He walks out rapidly, followed by the others, and the dining-room is emptied. Outside on the steps are heard the calls of, "Goodby! Goodby! Come back soon!" *Then the door falls to with a bang, and there is silence. Only Sidorenko remains on the stage, in the hallway.*

There is a pause. Vladimir enters hurriedly and passes directly to the hallway. Sidorenko hands him his cap and hangs his sword on him. Vladimir takes a step toward the door, stops, stands still for a moment, then quickly returns to the dining-room. Nina rushes in and, silently, without tears, flings herself on his neck.

VLADIMIR. Nina! Nina! My darling! My own! [*He repeatedly strokes her head and kisses her hair, and then looks about helplessly. Asya quietly re-enters the room and rushes towards them.*]

VLADIMIR. Asya, help! — Ninochka!

Asya holds Nina back. Vladimir tears himself away from her embrace and goes out quickly, almost running. Nina pushes Asya aside and, with a piercing shriek, flings herself after her husband. She staggers and drops into the arms of Asya and Sidorenko.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The time is two months later.

The scenery is the same as in the second act. It is evening. The lamp is burning. The samovar is on the table. Olga Petrovna is sitting at the table near the samovar; on the opposite side, Piotr Ivanovich with his own special tea cup and a newspaper before him. Asya is giving tea to a little boy and a little girl, the children of an officer killed in the war. Semyonov is sitting at a small table aside from the rest, smoking. On the wall is a large war map with tiny flags of different colors stuck into it.

ASYA. Sonya, do you want some more?

SONYA [*quietly*]. Thank you.

ASYA. Kolya, you mustn't rattle the spoon. Drink nicely.

OLGA. Sonya, how is your mother? Is she well?

SONYA. Yes, thank you.

KOLYA [*gleefully*]. Mamma cries all the time. Her eyes are we-ed, we-ed, like a lobster's.

ASYA [*with a faint smile*]. Lobsters' eyes aren't red.

KOLYA. Aren't they? What color are they?

ASYA. Black.

KOLYA. Black? Why are they black?

ASYA. Because God made them so.

KOLYA. Why did God make them so?

ASYA [*patiently*]. Because it's the way He thought they ought to be.

KOLYA. Ought to be?

ASYA. Yes, ought to be.

KOLYA. Our Jerry has yellow eyes, like a cat's.

ASYA. All right, drink your tea, drink — Sonyechka, will you have some jam?

SONYA. Thank you.

There is a silence.

OLGA. It's a month today since Volodya left. I wonder where he is now, poor boy?

Another silence ensues. Then the bell rings. Semyonov quietly steps into the antechamber and opens the door. The Prince enters, takes off his overcoat, and walks into the dining-room.

PIOTR. Ah, the Prince!

PRINCE [*he goes round the table and shakes hands with everyone; when he comes near Sonya, she jumps off the chair and makes a courtesy*]. It's so dreary everywhere one doesn't know where to go to or what to do with oneself. I hope you are not mortally sick of me, Olga Petrovna.

OLGA. How, Prince, what makes you say that? Of course we are not. We are always very glad to see you. Ninochka is in better spirits, too, when you are around. She is so dejected, poor girl.

PRINCE. Is she well?

OLGA. How can she be well when she doesn't eat anything? She keeps brooding and brooding. Will you have a glass of tea, Prince?

PRINCE. Yes, thank you. [*He takes the glass.*] It's cold and cloudy outside. The city is all dead, no life at all. Have you had word from your people recently?

Olga. There was a letter from Vladimir yesterday, but nothing from Volodya for a whole week. He used to write every day. Then the letters suddenly stopped. Asya is beginning to worry fearfully, and I am terribly worried too. Something might happen, God forbid. It doesn't take long to catch cold. Piotr Ivanovich reads the papers every day, but I am afraid to. When I look at a newspaper and see all the killed and wounded and lost — lost with no trace of them left behind — I feel as if I had been knocked in the head with a club.

Prince. I think if anything happened they would let you know. And as to your not getting any letters, that's not surprising.

Piotr. They have nothing to write; so they don't write. We here have nothing to do; but out there they have no time for trifles — they have work to do.

Olga. I know, Piotr, but yet — there is Asya — she is worrying herself to death. I am not speaking about myself, though I am so, so sorry for them. Piotr Ivanovich is just trying to put up a bold front. Don't let him fool you. I know he can't sleep nights. He keeps pacing the room to and fro, to and fro like a pendulum.

Piotr [*angrily*]. It's insomnia, that's all. You know very well I always suffer from insomnia at this time of the year.

Olga. Don't be telling stories, Piotr. Insomnia? Nonsense!

Silence.

Prince. You are still taking care of the children, Aleksandra Ivanovich?

Asya [*quietly*]. Yes.

Olga. Taking care of the children! She should have been taking care of her own by this time. Upon my word, I cannot understand you! Are you crazy, all of you, or what! What nonsense to marry and then

part! Neither a wife nor a widow! The idiocy of it passes my comprehension.

Asya. I wanted it myself, Mother.

Kolya [*in a ringing voice*]. My father got killed in the war. The Germans killed him.

Prince [*startled by the unexpectedness of the child's remark*]. What?

Asya [*hurriedly*]. Drink your tea, Kolya; drink, it'll get cold.

Kolya. I am drinking.

Asya. Go on, go on, drink.

There is silence, during which Nina comes in quietly.

Nina. The Prince? I didn't know you were here. Why didn't you let me know, Mamma?

Prince. I've just come.

Nina [*seating herself at the table opposite the Prince*]. What a long, dreary day this has been.

Olga. Don't think so much about it and it won't seem so long to you.

Nina [*with a faint smile*]. I should be glad not to think, Mamma, but it thinks itself.

Silence.

Prince. I have a piece of sad news. Daue's body arrived at the station today.

At this remark all raise their heads. Olga Petrovna wipes her eyes with her handkerchief. Piotr Ivanovich frowns and buries his face in the newspaper. There is silence.

Nina. Poor Daue! An end to all his music now. You remember how he had set his heart on going to Petrograd to study, and how he had made all his plans for giving up the army and following his great ambition?

Prince. Fate decreed differently, it seems.

SEMYONOV [*with heat*]. What Fate? A monstrous insane outrage, not Fate!

PRINCE. Yes — of course.

Silence.

OLGA. You remember, Asya, how he came back and wanted to take a last look at his violin? "If I get killed," he said, "the violin won't play by itself." [*Sobbing.*] God! God! What is happening in the world!

SEMYONOV. A lot of stupidity and wickedness is happening.

Silence.

NINA. We knew a week ago that Daue had been killed. But what does it mean —"Killed?" It's so hard to grasp the significance of it. Only now I seem to realize what it implies when I know that he has been brought here, that somewhere at the station there is a car and that in a coffin Daue is lying — that he is lying there and doesn't know we are talking about him. It's so heart-rending! How terrible war is!

PRINCE. Yes, it is terrible. And yet there is a great deal of tragic beauty in it. I don't know how it is, but I feel drawn to the war myself; something pulls me to it.

SEMYONOV [*in an undertone*]. It seems to be a very mild form of attraction.

ASYA [*reprovingly*]. Senya!

PRINCE [*who has not caught Semyonov's remark*]. What's that, Semyon Nikolayevich?

SEMYONOV. Nothing, nothing.

PRINCE. What is life here? It is not even a game; it is just a long-drawn-out agony. We don't live here; we just exist. All our interests, our little troubles and preoccupations, are so trivial, so insignificant. Our ac-

tions are commonplace. But there, face to face with death, the everyday shell drops off, and man becomes that which he ought always to be — the tragic bearer of heroic ideas.

SEMYONOV [*to himself*]. He's going it hard.

Asya shakes her head at him reproachfully.

PRINCE [*contemplatively*]. It may seem strange, perhaps, but I honestly envy those who are in the thick of it. There is movement, fight, real life out there.

NINA. You say you envy them, but my heart bleeds for them. Hungry, cold, always facing death and pain and misery; what sort of life can it be! It is one continuous agony, not life. How many killed, how many maimed, how many widows and orphans, how much wretchedness and suffering! And all this on account of one man's whim. What an injustice! What an atrocity! No, my whole being revolts against this butchery.

Silence.

NINA [*disconsolately*]. It's so hard! My God, it's so hard! I don't know — maybe I am a silly woman, but I began to sew underwear for the wounded soldiers. I worked till I got so tired I couldn't work any more. And suddenly I had the feeling that all that didn't make out my life; it didn't represent me; it didn't make me forget my own cares and experiences. I mean to take up work in the hospital. I'll try. I don't know if my nerves will stand it. And so I drift from one thing to another, torn out of my element. No one needs me; I am good for nothing. The most terrible thing is that I hardly ever get any letters, and when I do get them, they have been so long coming that they have lost almost all significance. I read, see the familiar hand, and

think: But this letter was written twelve days ago. Maybe — [*Her voice quivers.*]

PIOTR. Cowardice and nothing else. It's painful to listen to. The wife of a Russian officer ought to take it differently.

NINA [*with a mournful, submissive smile*]. Ah, Papa, what sort of officer's wife am I? I am a wife, that's all — an insignificant woman whose husband is all in all to her.

PIOTR [*shrugging his shoulders*]. There! There! There! And I think —

OLGA. Piotr!

PIOTR. But if I can't listen to these everlasting whinings and lamentations! [*Drawing up his shoulders.*] Why, the idea! A man is defending his country, is fulfilling his sacred duty; and what does his wife think about? Nothing but how to take away his courage and honor. She wants to keep him in the nursery and bedroom.

OLGA. Piotr!

NINA. I don't want that, you know it, Papa.

PIOTR [*brushing the remark aside, and rising and flourishing the newspaper in the air, without addressing anyone in particular*]. I can imagine the letters she writes to him. I'll tell you plainly that if I had had a wife like that in my time I'd simply have turned her out of the house. Yes, I'd have turned her out — turned her out. [*To Olga.*] Oh, let me alone. I say it because it's the way I feel about it. It's abominable!

He shrugs his shoulders, waves the newspaper and goes out. There is silence. Nina weeps quietly. The children look with fright from one to another. The Prince remains sitting with downcast eyes. Semyonov puffs vigorously at his cigarette.

OLGA. There. It's always that way. Don't cry,

Ninochka. Don't you know your father? He himself suffers, more than anybody else, but he carries on that way just to relieve his feelings a little. It seems to do him good.

NINA. I know, Mamma dear.

ASYA. Well, children, have you had enough?

SONYA. Yes, thank you.

ASYA. Come, then, I'll take you home. It's time to go to bed. Your mother will be worrying about you. Senya, will you go with us?

SEMYONOV [*rising*]. Yes, of course I will.

ASYA. Say goodby now, children, and come.

Sonya and Kolya walk up to each one in turn, Sonya making a pretty courtesy, and Kolya awkwardly scraping his feet. Olga Petrovna kisses them. Then Asya takes them into the anteroom, puts on their hats and coats, and they go out, followed by Semyonov.

OLGA. Poor children. They are orphans now — and with no means of support, either. His salary was all they had to live on. She'll get a pension. But it's not like having a father.

PRINCE. Why does Aleksandra Ivanovna look after them?

OLGA. Out of pity. She has a good heart, that's why. The mother is still crazy with grief. She does nothing but cry the whole day long. If Asya hadn't looked out for the children, they would have had to go to bed without supper, I suppose. No, Prince, don't talk to me about the beauty of war. Maybe I don't understand, but I cannot see anything beautiful in it. No, no, your war is ugly. [*She waves her hand deprecatingly, lays her napkin on the table, and goes towards the door. As she passes Nina, she strokes her head.*] Don't be offended by what Papa says; Papa is old. He is troubled and is grieving for you and Volodya; so he

shouts — he doesn't know what about himself.— You stay here and have a chat together. I'll go and see about supper. [*She goes out. There is a long silence. Somewhere a clock strikes the hour of nine.*]

NINA. What an awful evening! It's so dreary. In my room you can hear the wind whine in the garden. My heart feels so heavy I seem scarcely able to breathe. Why do I feel so today, Prince?

PRINCE. I don't know. Your nerves are all unstrung.

NINA. Maybe. But if you knew how hard it is! I am so glad you came. The whole day I am by myself. You know what my father is like, and Mamma and Asya have their own troubles. So I wander about alone all the time, like a loafer. There is no one to talk to, no one to pour one's heart out to. Nobody knows; nobody understands. [*She folds her hands on the table with a look of distress and lets her head drop on them.*]

PRINCE [*bending over across the table towards her and gently touching her hands*]. You know you have no friend more devoted than I.

NINA [*lifting her head and unconsciously drawing back her hands*]. I know it, but I can't speak to *you* about it.

PRINCE. Why not?

NINA [*with a sad smile*]. Because I know it can't be pleasant to you to hear me speak — about him. I know you won't say anything, but I can see that every word I say pains you.

PRINCE [*with a tragic air*]. But what's to be done, Nina Petrovna? Of course I am not going to dissemble and lie. I love you, and now that you are so unhappy and lonely I love you still more. Of course it costs me a terrific effort to understand your feelings when you mention Vladimir Aleksandrovich, and when I see you suffering so on his account. But I love you so much that

I suffer what you suffer. I strive to forget that you are suffering for a man who stands between me and you, and sometimes I actually succeed. I see that you are suffering, and God knows that if it were possible I would go there and take his place and let him come to you.

NINA [*putting out her hand to him across the table*]. Thank you, Prince. [*He kisses her hand reverently and immediately lets it go. There is silence.*]

NINA [*musingly*]. Who knows? Maybe after all, if — [*She breaks off abruptly and remains silent.*]

PRINCE [*quickly*]. What? If what?

NINA [*with averted gaze*]. Nothing. [*She gets up, goes to the window and, leaning her face against the pane, looks out into the dark night.*] How dark it is! Only the one little light out there! One might think it was late at night, not early in the evening.

PRINCE [*coming up to her*]. Nina Petrovna, what were you going to say?

NINA [*starting and trembling without turning around*]. Nothing.

PRINCE [*in a tremulous voice*]. I implore you. It seemed to me that — you can't imagine what it would mean to me. Nina Petrovna, one word! [*Nina turns slowly around, looking at him with strange, wide-open eyes.*]

PRINCE [*stretching out his arm towards her*]. I beg of you, Nina! For God's sake!

Nina, smiling queerly, puts out her arms to him and lays her hands on his shoulders, drawing him lightly towards her and looking long and fixedly into his eyes with an enigmatic expression on her face. Then she pushes him back, covers her face with her hands, and turns her back to him again.

PRINCE. Nina Petrovna, what does it mean? Nina?

NINA [*without turning around, hoarsely*]. It means that I am a low, ugly, depraved woman.

PRINCE. Nina Petrovna!

NINA [*imploringly*]. Leave me alone! Go. For heaven's sake leave me! I don't know myself what is the matter with me.

There is silence. The Prince looks intently at Nina, and she, as though feeling his gaze upon her, bows her head lower and lower as if something were pressing it down. The Prince suddenly flings his arms rudely around her shoulders and forcibly swings her toward him, looking into her eyes with wild passion.

PRINCE. Nina — you — you love me too?

Nina does not resist him, but merely closes her eyes and shakes her head faintly in denial.

PRINCE. No? — You don't love me? — Then what does all this mean?

NINA. I told you.

PRINCE. What? I don't understand you.

NINA. I —

PRINCE [*almost shaking her*]. What? — What? — Don't torture me. You do not love me? No?

NINA [*she opens her eyes; they look strange and as though covered with a mist*]. No. [*Suddenly she pushes him away almost venomously and walks past him, stopping at the door with her back toward him.*] I love nobody. [*She turns around with a quick gesture and faces the Prince with a look half of fright and half of detestation.*] I told you I was a low, depraved creature. [*Rapidly.*] You know what? — I love my husband with all my heart, with all my soul. I am all out there, with him — I think only of him — I don't want you; you disgust me. But if you wanted to, I —

PRINCE [*making a step towards her*]. Nina!

NINA [*drawing back in terror and putting out her hands as though for protection*]. Prince! for God's sake!

PRINCE [*coming quickly to her*]. Why do you torture me and yourself?

NINA [*pressing against the door post*]. It isn't I — I don't want this.

PRINCE [*seizing her outstretched arms and pulling her to him*]. Nina!

NINA [*struggling fiercely to twist her hands free*]. Let me go! How dare you! Let me go! [*She tears herself away, looking savagely at him out of the corners of her eyes, and rushes out, banging the door after her.*]

PRINCE [*remains standing a long time with head hanging as if dazed. Then he turns around and sees Semyonov, who has entered unobserved, standing at the door*]. Ah!

SEMYONOV [*with derision in his voice*]. Yes. That's right. Not bad for a beginning.

PRINCE. What?

SEMYONOV [*in the same tone of derision*]. Nothing. [*He sits down with a cool, leisurely air and pulls out the cigarette case from his pocket.*] On general principles it's contemptible enough. And yet, after all — animal instincts — law of nature. . . .

PRINCE [*controlling himself*]. What do you mean?

SEMYONOV. Just what I say.

PRINCE [*haughtily*]. What precisely?

SEMYONOV. You deign to be interested? Very well, as you please.— Naturally, a young, healthy, good-looking woman — her husband driven away to the war — it's a plain case. But if you wish to know my opinion of it, I'll tell you. I don't like your rôle at all.

PRINCE [*contemptuously*]. No?

SEMYONOV [*with perfect composure*]. No. Imagine! I'll even go further and say it isn't a nice rôle. And inasmuch as the expression on your face is so plain as to admit no doubt of its meaning, I have no objection to telling you what I mean.

PRINCE [*curtly*]. I demand an explanation.

SEMYONOV [*sardonically*]. You can't demand anything of me, Your Excellency, for I would send you straight to hell.

PRINCE [*making a step forward*]. How dare you?

SEMYONOV [*coolly*]. Sh! Sh!

PRINCE. But I insist.

SEMYONOV [*mockingly*]. Insist! Oh, well, what's the difference? [*In an even voice, pronouncing every word with deliberate emphasis.*] You know very well that she does not love you, that she loves her husband. You simply excite her as a man. Therefore, even should you succeed in catching the right moment, I tell you frankly I shouldn't envy you. Your position would be an extremely humiliating one.

PRINCE [*he shrugs his shoulders and, laughing contemptuously, goes to the table and sits down*]. All this is very interesting, and I hope to talk to you about it at another time and in another place.

SEMYONOV [*scowling and tilting his head to one side*]. What? A duel? No, no. Drop that talk. It's true these are war times. Still I don't propose to give up my life for anything like this. It will have to be something more interesting.

PRINCE [*contemptuously*]. You decline?

SEMYONOV. Yes, I decline. Just fancy!

PRINCE. Oh, well, you will change your mind.

SEMYONOV. No. This is final. I assure you, I haven't the slightest inclination to fight with you, and if you are going to try to force me by petty annoyances, then let me tell you again that, after all, these are war times and I have the proper kind of weapon to put an end to them forever.

PRINCE [*sneeringly*]. A revolver?

SEMYONOV. Yes, a revolver. And not a bad revolver, either; a present from the late Daue. [*Chang-*

ing his tone.] And if you will permit yourself to badger me in any way, I promise you I'll shoot your head off as calmly and deliberately as I am talking to you now.

PRINCE. We shall see.

SEMYONOV. We shall see.

PRINCE. At any rate, I shall get ahead of you, Mr. Semyonov.

The bell rings. Semyonov rises and slowly goes to the door and opens it. He is heard speaking to someone. Then the door shuts and Semyonov returns, looking troubled and uneasily eyeing a telegram which he holds in his hand.

PRINCE. I want to tell you only this —

SEMYONOV [*frowning fiercely*]. Let's stop this conversation for the present. We'll finish it some other time. Here is — a telegram. [*He goes over to the door and half opens it.*] Piotr Ivanovich! Ho, Piotr Ivanovich! — What's the matter with them out there? Are they asleep? — [*He looks at the telegram.*] Do you know what I think, Prince?

PRINCE [*still contemptuously*]. What do you want?

SEMYONOV [*ignoring his sneer*]. I don't like this telegram.

PRINCE [*alarmed, rising*]. What is it?

SEMYONOV. It's from out there — addressed to Piotr Ivanovich direct. [*Speaking quickly.*] I think we ought to open and read it first.

PRINCE. But —

SEMYONOV [*impatiently*]. What "but"? The circumstances call for it. I don't do it out of curiosity. Suppose something has happened? Then we can at least prepare them, break the news as gently as possible. Who knows what fool concocts these telegrams, anyway? [*He opens the telegram, reads it, and then, lifting his face, which has turned strangely grave, holds it out to*

the Prince.] It has come. [*He steps quickly to the wall and remains standing there with his back turned.*]

PRINCE [*after rapidly glancing over the telegram, and looking at Semyonov with an expression of horror*]. Good God! What's to be done now? What does it mean?

SEMYONOV [*he remains standing in the same position with his back to the Prince. He speaks hoarsely*]. What? Killed! That's all! — They've killed him. [*He turns around swiftly, snatches the telegram from the Prince's hands and sticks it in his pocket*]. My! How stupid! Why are you standing there like that? Go tell Nina Petrovna. She'll know how to manage it better than we — and I'll try to break it to Asya.— Well? Why aren't you going? Go, please.

The Prince obediently crosses over to the door and goes out.

SEMYONOV. There! Volodya, too! The devil!

He bites his moustache, and remains standing in the middle of the room, sunk in thought.— A shrill, piercing cry is heard from a distance inside the house. Semyonov trembles, lets his moustache drop out of his mouth, and listens. The cry is repeated. Hurried steps are heard and the Prince runs in.

PRINCE. She heard me tell her. Do you hear? How terrible!

SEMYONOV. Who? Olga Petrovna?

PRINCE. Yes — I told Nina — she heard me. I think we must call a doctor.

SEMYONOV. What's the good of a doctor? The devil! — And Asya will be here any minute, too.

The wild shriek draws nearer; the door opens noisily and Olga Petrovna rushes in with her gray hair undone,

looking pitiful and terrible. Nina comes running after her, weeping, distracted and trying to quiet her.

NINA. Mamma! Dear Mamma! For Heaven's sake!

OLGA. Where is it? Where? It is not true — not true! — Killed! — It's not true! — Volodya killed! — Who said it? [*She reels and falls. Nina and the Prince catch her and put her in a chair. Nina puts her arms around her neck, kisses her, strokes her head and cries.*]

NINA. Mamma! My dear little mother! Mamma! You mustn't.— My darling mother.

PIOTR [*entering, and with quick, firm steps crossing directly over to Olga. His face is gravely solemn and seems as though turned into stone*]. Olga!

OLGA [*flinging herself at him and clutching his hands*]. Piotr — they are lying, aren't they? Volodya killed! — Piotr! [*She seizes him with her hands, but instantly pushes him back and tears herself away from Nina's embrace.*] It isn't true.— It cannot be.— Leave me alone! — [*She breaks away from her seat, runs into a corner, goes down on her knees and, as in a fit of madness, begins to bow her head rapidly to the ground.*] Lord, Lord, Lord! — Lord!

Piotr Ivanovich drops heavily on a chair near the table and covers his face with his hands. Asya appears at the door, in a hat and jacket, pale and frightened. At sight of Olga Petrovna kneeling and bowing she stops as though anchored to the spot and her hands drop limply to her sides.

OLGA [*bowing her head*]. They have killed Volodya! Volodya! — Oh, Lord, Lord, help! — Help, O Lord! — [*Seeing Asya.*] Asya! — Asya darling! Our Volodya is no more. They have killed our Volodya! [*Crawling*

to her on her knees, she takes both Asya's hands and kisses them again and again.] Killed! Asya, Asya darling! — No more Volodya.— O Lord, Lord, Lord!

Asya stands absolutely rigid, wide-eyed, and staring blankly before her. Nina sits with her head on the table, sobbing. The Prince and Semyonov stand aside with bowed heads. Piotr Ivanovich sits at the table, his face buried in his hands, but dry-eyed.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

It is golden autumn. The house and garden are the same as in the first act. Occasionally dead leaves detach themselves from the trees, and float circling to the ground. Through the trees, now bare, are seen the roofs of houses and the churches of the little town. Piotr Ivanovich, wearing an oldish military cloak and a cap pulled down over his ears, is sitting with bent back on the balustrade. Near him are a paper and a cigar-case, but he neither reads nor smokes; he stares blankly straight ahead of him. For a considerable while he remains alone on the stage in this pose. Then the Prince and Nina appear on the terrace. Nina is not in mourning costume, but smartly and elegantly dressed as though for some festive occasion. Her face is animated and beaming. At sight of her father she turns serious, though not without a slight effort.

NINA. Papa, sitting alone again! [*She seats herself beside him and puts her arm around him.*] You'll get sick if you go on this way. It's enough, Papa. It can't be helped. You can't bring him back to life.

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*assuming a bold and care-free air*]. Oh, I just came out to get some fresh air. The weather is splendid.— I have been reading the paper.— Lemberg has been taken.— Have you read it, Prince?

PRINCE [*hesitatingly*]. Why — er — yes — of course.

NINA [*pityingly, stroking him on the shoulder*]. Papa, Lemberg was taken long ago. Have you forgotten?

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*with an air of interest*]. Was it? When? I didn't know.

NINA [*with a stealthy, significant look at the Prince*]. You have simply forgotten, Papa.

PIOTR IVANOVICH. Maybe.

NINA [*heaving a deep sigh*]. Of course you have. You are not doing right, staying away by yourself all the time and avoiding people. It will hurt you.

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*with sudden animation*]. It's nothing — a trifle.— You remember Volodya's letter from Yaroslav, Nina?

NINA. Yes, yes, I remember. You mustn't speak about it, Papa.

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*bowing his head*]. Yes, of course.

NINA. You are only exciting yourself. What can be done? Volodya is not the only one — lots of people have lost their lives.

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*listlessly*]. Yes, lots, lots.— What can be done?

PRINCE [*in an effort to console him*]. After all, your son Volodya died an enviable death.

Piotr Ivanovich looks with fright at the Prince as though afraid he might make some tactless, uncalled-for remark, then quickly lowers his eyes.

PRINCE. He died like a hero. That ought to be some comfort to you after all. An officer who was wounded in the same action told me that if it hadn't been for your son the whole regiment would have been annihilated.

PIOTR IVANOVICH [*with a queer, sickly frown*]. Yes, yes — I know — yes.

PRINCE. He said that in spite of the terrible fire, Volodya never once went down into the trench. He remained above, calmly directing the firing.

PIOTR IVANOVICH. Yes, yes — I know — yes.

PRINCE. At last the Austrians concentrated almost their entire fire on his division. And when he was wounded, he told his comrades he was happy to die like that. It was a heroic death, say what you will. Im-

agine the strength of soul required to die feeling happy in the cause of one's death. It denotes the highest will power, the sublimest enthusiasm, and you have a right to be proud of your son's memory.

PIOTR [*rising with a nervous movement and picking up now the paper, now the cigar-case, and letting them drop*]. Yes, yes — I know — he died a heroic death — proud of his memory — yes, yes. [*Suddenly straightening himself and flourishing the newspaper in the air.*] I know myself that Volodya died the death of a hero. Yes, sir, I know it; I know he couldn't have done otherwise! Yes, a hero, a hero! What's the use of talking about it? No use! No use, at all! Excuse me! . . . [*He wraps the cloak nervously around him, presses the newspaper to his chest, and quickly walks into the house. Nina and the Prince, a little embarrassed, follow him with their eyes. There is silence.*]

NINA [*quietly*]. You must pardon my father, Prince. Volodya's terrible death has made a perfect baby of him. He is only the wreck of his former self.

PRINCE [*deferentially and sadly*]. I understand, Nina Petrovna.

NINA [*sitting down on the balustrade where her father had been sitting*]. Papa cannot endure to hear anything about Volodya. You know, he never wept a tear. He just keeps quiet. And his silence is more horrible than the worst crying and sobbing. It is so awfully hard to look at him, so hard! Good God, when will this war end? When will it end? And will those who caused it never be brought to account for all the tears, all the misery?

PRINCE. I think they will.

NINA. Is it possible that after all these horrors there will again be wars and people will again die and be killed? Is it possible that the people will never come to their senses, never understand what they are doing?

PRINCE. I don't think they ever will.

There is silence.

NINA [*musingly*]. Semyonov said that war can never be done away with because war is not opposed to human nature, but on the contrary is quite in keeping with human nature. Can that be true?

PRINCE. Oh, well, there may be a difference of opinion as to that.

NINA. I don't see how there can be any difference of opinion. [*With heat.*] If it were as Semyonov says, then I think the human race ought simply be wiped off the face of the earth. It would have no right to exist.

The Prince shrugs his shoulders in indecision. There is a pause.

NINA. What beauty all around! See how the leaves are falling. And the sun is shining as though it were afraid it might interfere with the beauty and the stillness. [*She laughs.*] I am happy, Prince. Mamma thinks me shocking for having given up mourning; she says I must have forgotten Volodya. But how can I meet Vladimir in a black dress? I can't think without tears of poor Volodya, who lies buried somewhere out there in a strange, horrible soil,— but still I am happy. I may be an egotist, I may be a bad woman, but I am happy. When I received the telegram from Vladimir, I thought I'd go mad with joy. I wanted to sing, to dance.

PRINCE [*dolefully*]. Yes, of course. But don't you think, Nina Petrovna, it is a little cruel to tell me so?

NINA [*recollecting herself, with a wayward smile*]. Oh, I beg your pardon, Prince, but, upon my word, I am so happy that I have forgotten everything. I was in-

considerate. Forgive me. [*She puts out her hand to him.*]

PRINCE [*declining to take it*]. I have no right either to forgive or to resent your conduct. I have forced myself into your life, and I can lay no claim to a place in it.

NINA [*grieved and sorry, yet with a smile*]. Why do you speak that way, Prince? You know I am very fond of you.

PRINCE [*with an affected smile*]. Thank you — I value it very highly — but it's not exactly the sentiment I wanted.

NINA [*grieved*]. But what can I do?

PRINCE. You can do nothing.— Well, let's drop it. [*He shakes his head.*] What I wanted to say is this. As long as everything was uncertain, I did not think I had a right to leave you. I thought that after all I might be useful — that if the worst should happen, it might be easier for you in your ordeal to know that you had a friend near you, ready to do everything for you.

NINA [*quietly*]. I am so grateful to you, Prince.

PRINCE. But now circumstances have altered. Vladimir Aleksandrovich is returning home. His wound cannot be serious, or he would have written you about it. I feel that my further presence here is not needed, that I would be in your own and your husband's way.

NINA [*sadly*]. You mean to leave us?

PRINCE. Yes; I am going to Moscow this evening — and I think we shall never see each other again.

NINA [*after a pause*]. Well, perhaps you are right. You had better go.

PRINCE [*bitterly*]. Is that all you have to tell me for our last farewell?

NINA [*throwing up her arms in a gesture of helplessness*]. What else can I say?

PRINCE. This, Nina — let me frankly call you by

your first name for the first and last time. In my heart I always call you so. [*Nina, in embarrassment, hangs her head and locks her fingers.*] — Tell me, have you never had any other feeling for me? Don't be surprised, and don't be frightened at my putting this question to you. I want nothing from you any more; but it would make it easier for me to go if I could think the ruin of my life was only an accident, that the rôle I played in relation to you was not so ridiculous, after all! Spare my masculine self-love. [*He gives a short laugh.*]

NINA. I don't know — I can't tell myself.

PRINCE. So, after all —?

NINA [*with sudden resolution*]. Listen, Prince! you have been so good to me all this time, I am so thankful to you, I'll tell you. I'll tell you the truth. [*After a second's hesitation.*] Well, yes, there were moments when I loved you.

PRINCE [*grasping her hand*]. Nina!

NINA [*pulling her hand away*]. But those were moments of weakness, when I felt all alone in the world, convinced that I should never see Vladimir again. [*Lowering her head.*] I am a woman, Prince,— just an ordinary woman, as you once said.— You remember? I cannot live without love. And so, when I thought that Vladimir was killed — [*Fidgeting uneasily, and not looking at him.*] It's ugly, mean — but I — [*She breaks off as under a strain.*]

PRINCE. That means that if —

NINA [*frightened, quickly raising her eyes to him*]. Prince! Don't! You mustn't say that. It was simply stronger than myself. [*With lowered voice.*] I am an ugly, immoral person — a woman to be despised.

PRINCE. Maybe. But I love you just as you are, and now more than ever.

NINA [*rising quickly*]. Goodby, Prince. You mustn't speak about it any more.

PRINCE. One word, Nina, one word! So, if your husband had really been killed —

NINA [*silently for a while she struggles with herself, then with resolution says quickly:*] Well, yes!

There is silence. Nina stands with her face turned away from the Prince, her hands trembling.

PRINCE. So! How stupid the ways of life are! Just accident. It's absurd. Thousands of people killed in the war, and —

NINA [*drawing herself up and stiffening straight as a cord*]. Prince!

PRINCE [*stubbornly and dolefully*]. You are afraid of the words. But if it is the truth! — Why should I mince it, why should I sham and lie, when that which makes you so happy and radiant today means for me the end of all my hopes, the end of love and happiness? If you can so lightly and so easily sacrifice me to another, then why should I dissemble? I'll tell you the truth — why shouldn't I? When you were looking over the lists of the dead, trembling lest your husband's name be there, I, too, was looking for it.

NINA [*indignantly*]. Could you do a thing like that? That was vile.

PRINCE. What was vile? Is it vile to love?

NINA [*contemptuously*]. Love! Let that word alone! How dare you talk about love?

PRINCE [*surprised*]. Nina!

NINA [*proudly*]. I am no Nina to you. How dare you call me Nina? You loved me? [*Laughing contemptuously.*] You wanted a good-looking woman, that's all. Why, men like you cannot love. They don't know what it is. Let me tell you now: — I never, never loved you, not for a single moment.— Let me alone. Do you hear? [*She turns quickly and goes into the house.*]

PRINCE. Nina. [*He remains standing for a long time with head bowed, then turns around resolutely and goes to the gate. Before he reaches it, he is met by Asya and Semyonov. Asya is in deep mourning. On the sleeve of Semyonov's top-coat is a red cross.*]

SEMYONOV. Ah, Your Excellency! Going already?

PRINCE. Yes, I am going. I want to say goodby to you, Aleksandra Ivanovna.

ASYA [*mechanically*]. Goodby.

SEMYONOV. Why this formal leave-taking? Are you going away?

PRINCE. Yes; I am going to Moscow tonight.

SEMYONOV. That so? H'm — Well, I guess it's best.

PRINCE [*with an affected smile*]. I suppose it is.

SEMYONOV. Well, goodby, then. You are going away for good, I suppose?

PRINCE. Yes!

SEMYONOV. Goodby.

They shake hands and part.

SEMYONOV [*to the Prince at the gate*]. One moment, Prince. [*The Prince stops; Semyonov goes over to him.*] I wanted to tell you that — I had a very bad opinion of you — and I am glad to find that you have force and will and dignity. I thought — excuse me — that you were just a plain rascal.— Now I see you have suffered a great deal. Forgive the past. I wish you well.

PRINCE [*with a touch of haughty irony*]. Thank you; I am deeply moved.

SEMYONOV. Goodby. [*He gives the Prince a vigorous handshake and follows him a while with his eyes. The Prince goes out without looking around. Semyonov runs up the steps to overtake Asya.*] Asya, wait.

ASYA [*stopping*]. What is it?

SEMYONOV. Tell you what, let's sit down here a little. The atmosphere inside is stifling; upon my word, it's impossible to breathe. Piotr Ivanovich never says a word, Olga Petrovna cries, and Nina is crazy with joy. We don't exist for her now. Let's sit down here.

ASYA [*obediently*]. All right. [*She quietly goes down the steps and takes a seat on the bench under the trees.*] I just wanted to see what Mother was doing.

SEMYONOV. You mean Olga Petrovna?

ASYA [*quietly*]. Yes, Mother. She mustn't be allowed to remain alone for long.

SEMYONOV [*mechanically*]. You still call her "Mother"?

ASYA [*quietly*]. Yes.

SEMYONOV. H'm — well, oh, yes! [*After a pause.*] So the Prince is going away. That's good. The fact is, it would all be ridiculous if it weren't so tragic. Strange what a jumble of things life is — tragedy, comedy, with a little merry farce thrown in.

ASYA [*mechanically, and hardly listening*]. Where is the farce?

SEMYONOV [*with an insincere laugh*]. Well, between you and me, isn't it a farce? Why not?

ASYA [*wearily*]. Oh, stop, Semyon Nikolayevich.

SEMYONOV. I'd be glad to stop, Aleksandra Ivanovna, but I can't.

ASYA [*pained*]. It's a bore.

SEMYONOV. For you it's a bore; for me it's misery. What's to be done? You see, the Prince is going away. That means that they have talked themselves to a conclusion, after all. But you and I seem to be absolutely deadlocked; we don't seem to be able to reach a conclusion.

ASYA [*pained, glancing all around*]. Really, Senya — I don't know — what conclusion? All there is to be

said has been said over and over again. What good is your persistence?

SEMYONOV. *You* may think all has been said, but *I* don't. There is still the last word to be said.

ASYA. Say it then.

SEMYONOV. It's easy to say "say it."

ASYA [*indifferently*]. Don't say it, then.

SEMYONOV. Pshaw! How you throw ice water on a fellow's head! It's cruel, Aleksandra Ivanovna.

ASYA. I won't; I won't. Say what you intended to say. [*There is silence. Semyonov looks at Asya out of the corners of his eyes, twirls his moustache, and raises it to his mouth.*] Well, I have to go, Senya.

SEMYONOV. One moment. Listen, Asya.

ASYA. I am listening.

SEMYONOV. Listen, then. [*Hesitating, then making up his mind.*] I know that you are unhappy, and that you don't care for me. But the situation is this — No, that's not what I wanted to say. I'll tell you straight out. I love you, Asya, and I haven't much longer to live.

ASYA [*annoyed*]. You know what, Senya. You have said so much about dying that we have ceased to believe it. For three years now you've been telling us that you are dying. [*She turns away with a mild wave of her hand.*]

SEMYONOV [*his face changing*]. I beg your pardon for not having died. Honestly, it isn't my fault.

ASYA [*sighing*]. Goodness gracious! Words, words, words! Nothing but words! What's it all for?

SEMYONOV [*with an affected laugh*]. For this —

ASYA [*throwing up her hands and shrugging her shoulders*]. Stop, Semyon Nikolayevich!

SEMYONOV. But if I love you!

ASYA. Oh, for God's sake, how sick I am of it! [*In*

a burst of vexation.] You are standing with one foot in the grave and talk about love. [*She rises.*]

SEMYONOV [*also rising, his face pale with rage*]. Yes. So? Fine!— What of it? I am standing with one foot in the grave, but your Volodya has been all in the grave a long time.

ASYA [*utters a short shriek and drops down on the bench and covers her face with her hands*]. Oh, Senya!

There is silence. Semyonov looks at her, his whole body trembling.

SEMYONOV [*coming to himself*]. Asya! Asya! Forgive me! I — I didn't mean to.— I don't know —

ASYA [*suddenly letting her hands fall, in a dead voice*]. It's all the same. [*She rises and slowly goes towards the house.*]

SEMYONOV [*following her, not knowing how to undo the effect of the remark he allowed to slip in his heat*]. Asya, I swear I didn't mean to say it.

NINA [*appearing on the balcony*]. Ah, you here? Where is the Prince? Is he gone?

SEMYONOV. Yes.

NINA [*with a momentary expression of sadness flitting across her face*]. Is he?— Have you been to the station, Semyon Nikolayevich? [*To Asya as she passes by her towards the house.*] What's the matter? You look so queer. Has anything happened?

ASYA. No; I have a headache. [*She goes out.*]

NINA. Haven't you been at the station?

SEMYONOV. No; I called them up. The train will arrive at three.

NINA [*disappointed*]. You said it was due at two.

SEMYONOV. So it is, according to the timetable, but the station master said it will probably be an hour late. So far, not a single train has arrived on schedule time.

NINA. Are you going there?

SEMYONOV. No. No soldiers are coming today except Vladimir Aleksandrovich. It's a regular train.

NINA. I ought to go, but — [*Smiling constrainedly.*] I can't. I am so excited I can scarcely contain myself. Even here I am almost crazy. It seems to me, somehow, that he would like it better if I met him at home with no strangers around.

SEMYONOV [*mechanically*]. Yes, certainly. The Prince has offered to bring him here in his motor. So you needn't worry.

NINA. What? The Prince?

SEMYONOV. Yes; he said he would go to the station and bring Vladimir Aleksandrovich home.

NINA [*her eyes cloud over with a mist*]. How kind of him! Don't you think he is a very kind man, Semyon Nikolayevich?

SEMYONOV. Who? The Prince? Yes, he is — not without a sense of gratitude.— So you are going to remain at home?

NINA. Yes! — I can't — [*She smiles sadly.*] You know, I am afraid.

SEMYONOV. Of what?

NINA. I am just afraid — afraid that when I see the wound —

SEMYONOV. There's nothing to be afraid of. He wrote you it was healing already; — so it can't be very serious. He would have prepared you beforehand, if it were.

NINA [*with a sickly smile*]. I know it isn't dangerous — and yet — Well, I don't know — I am afraid.

SEMYONOV. You had better stay at home, then, if you are so excited.

NINA [*sitting down on the balustrade*]. Sit down, Semyon Nikolayevich — I don't know why, but I have

a horror of remaining alone. Asya has gone to Mamma.

SEMYONOV. All right. I'll stay with you. [*He takes a seat opposite Nina.*]

NINA [*musingly*]. Now we'll all be together again.

SEMYONOV. Not exactly all.

NINA [*sorrowfully*]. No, not all; you are right. Poor Volodya! Poor Daue! I am happy, but I'm ashamed to be. I am so sorry for Mother, for Asya, for Father.

SEMYONOV [*lighting a cigarette*]. Yes, you are lucky, after all.

NINA. He is wounded, though.

SEMYONOV. What if he is? The wound will heal. You know, it's even better so. If he hadn't been wounded, he might have been killed later. Now it's all over. Even if he should want to go again when he is cured, you won't let him. In the meantime the war will end, and then you can begin to live. With the cross of St. George, all roads are open to him. He can get anything he wants. You'll move to Petrograd — I can't for the life of me get used to that name — Petrograd.

NINA [*smiling gayly*]. No, no; I won't let him go again. Let others go now. Vladimir has done his part.

SEMYONOV. And has distinguished himself doing it, too.

NINA [*radiant*]. Try as I may, I can't imagine Vladimir in war — a hero — under fire. As I see him, he is just a plain, dear man.

SEMYONOV. It's men like him that make heroes.

NINA [*ecstatically*]. Ah, Semyon Nikolayevich, if you only knew how happy I am!

SEMYONOV [*with a friendly smile*]. I am glad you are, from the bottom of my heart.

NINA [*plaintively*]. Mamma is angry at me because I'm not in black. I haven't forgotten Volodya, but I

simply couldn't wear mourning today. My heart is full of sunshine, so how can I put on crêpe?

SEMYONOV. Why should you? What good is it?

The mother enters, with stooped back, wrinkled face, and hair turned completely gray. Asya follows close behind her.

NINA. There is Mamma.

OLGA PETROVNA [*listlessly*]. How do you do, Semyon Nikolayevich? Thank you for coming. At least you haven't forgotten. [*Sitting down on the top step.*] Nina, she has forgotten her brother Volodya.

NINA [*vexed*]. Oh, Mamma! I have not forgotten him. Can't you understand?

OLGA [*looking disapprovingly at her*]. Yes, yes; don't tell me. You have forgotten, and that's all.

NINA [*excitedly*]. All right, I'll go and put on a black dress. I don't know what you want of me.

ASYA. Nina!

NINA [*instantly calming herself*]. But really — I don't know — Mother has been after me that way the whole day long!

She turns away. The mother follows her with the same disapproving look, shaking her head.

SEMYONOV [*to change the subject*]. How is your health, Olga Petrovna?

OLGA. What health! And what do I want health for? Volodichka is gone. [*She sobs.*]

ASYA. Mamma, you mustn't. [*She sits down beside her and presses up close to her.*]

OLGA [*stroking her hair*]. Here is Asenka; I have her left. Asenka has not forgotten Volodya. So we'll live with her. [*She presses Asya's head to her bosom.*] My poor little widow!

There is silence.

SEMYONOV. Soon Vladimir Aleksandrovich will be here.

OLGA [*crossly*]. Yes, he'll be here.— Well, thank God! But Volodichka will not be here. Our Volodichka will never be here again. You remember how you used to call them? Volodya the Big, and Volodya the Little. So Volodya the Big is coming, and Volodya the Little is not.

Asya cries.

NINA. Mamma, you are always exciting her.

OLGA. I am not exciting her.— Am I exciting you, Asenka?

ASYA [*trying to keep back her tears*]. No, Mamma; don't mind me.

OLGA. Yes; Volodya the Big is coming.

NINA [*shrugging her shoulders*]. You say it as though you were sorry he wasn't killed.

There is silence.

OLGA. Don't be angry, Ninochka. I am so sorry for Volodya.

NINA. Why, Mamma, aren't we all sorry?

OLGA. Oh, for you it's different. Your husband is coming home, and you'll console yourself with him. You are young; there is a long life ahead of you. But for your father and me there is nothing left now but to die.

NINA. Am I not your daughter? Am I nothing to you any more?

OLGA [*quietly, without listening to her*]. They have killed Volodya — killed him.

KATYA [*appearing at the door*]. Shall I set the table?

NINA [*rising quickly*]. Yes, of course; it's going on three already. Mamma, I'll go and attend to everything.

OLGA [*mechanically*]. Go, go.

Nina and Katya go out.

OLGA. Ninochka is annoyed with me. She thinks me a nuisance.

ASYA. Mamma, how can you talk like that! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

OLGA. Well, it's only natural. She is young, and I am boring her sick.

ASYA. She loves you, too.

OLGA. I know she does. But no one will ever love as Volodya did.

ASYA. And I, Mamma?

OLGA. You are a darling. But, after all, you are not my flesh and blood. You will forget Volodichka, and you will marry.

ASYA. I will never marry.

OLGA [*shaking her head*]. God knows, God knows, Asenka.

The chugging of an automobile and the tooting of a horn are heard from a distance. Asya and Semyonov sit up and listen.

SEMYONOV [*getting up*]. What's that? Is it they, already? It's only a little after two.

ASYA [*almost frightened*]. I don't know; the car seems to be coming this way.

Asya and Semyonov walk down the steps and listen.

ASYA. It's they. There is Sidorenko.— Nina! Nina!

She runs towards the house, then stops. Sidorenko,

tattered, sunburnt, but beaming, pushes through the gate with the trunk.

SEMYONOV. Hello, Sidorenko!

SIDORENKO. How do you do, Mr. Semyonov. [*He puts the trunk down on the ground.*]

SEMYONOV. Where is Vladimir Aleksandrovich?

SIDORENKO. He is here. The machine had to stop a little way off, it couldn't get through the lane.

The Prince rushes in, looking pale and distracted, followed by a Red Cross surgeon and a soldier.

PRINCE [*goes up to Semyonov, takes his arm, and pulls him aside. In a subdued voice*]. Prepare Nina Petrovna. Vladimir Aleksandrovich is very severely wounded.

SEMYONOV [*frightened*]. What? Severely? Then why didn't he —

PRINCE [*hastily*]. He didn't want to write — [*In a low voice*]. Both of his legs are torn off.

SEMYONOV [*recoiling*]. Impossible! — Asya!

ASYA [*who has heard all the Prince has said to Semyonov*]. I am going — at once, and — [*She runs into the house.*]

PRINCE. The car can't drive up here. We must get an armchair or something.

SEMYONOV. Armchair? Yes, directly. Here is one. [*He grabs hold of the rush-bottomed chair.*]

PRINCE. Take it, gentlemen.

The surgeon and the soldier quickly carry off the armchair. The Prince starts after them, but instantly turns back.

PRINCE. Please go and see to Nina Petrovna, and I'll stay here.

SEMYONOV. All right. [*He runs out.*]

OLGA [*in alarm*]. What is it, Prince? Is Vladimir Aleksandrovich very sick?

PRINCE. Yes.

OLGA [*rising quickly*]. Poor Ninochka! Why, how is that? What's the matter with him?

PRINCE. Both his legs are torn off.

Olga Petrovna silently crosses herself and drops limply on her seat.— Piotr Ivanovich walks in rapidly. Immediately after, Nina runs by, closely followed by Asya.

NINA. What is it, Prince? — Vladimir is wounded? — Dangerously? — Impossible! — Prince! —

PRINCE. Steady! Be calm! — Steady, Nina Petrovna!

NINA [*running down into the garden*]. Where is he? Where am I to go?

PRINCE. He'll be brought in soon.— Don't go.

NINA. Brought in? [*She stares at him, horrified. The Prince lowers his eyes, then runs to the gate. A group of people appear at the gate, carrying Vladimir Aleksandrovich in the armchair. He is lean, haggard, and emaciated. The stumps of his legs are covered with a blanket. On seeing Nina, the men put the armchair on the ground, the blanket slips off, and shows the stumps wrapped up in white, formless, ugly rags.*]

VLADIMIR [*putting out his hand*]. Nina! Ninochka!

Nina starts back from him in terror, reels, and falls straight into the Prince's arms as he holds them out to catch her.

CURTAIN

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